The Pleasure of the Ambiguous Gaze

Visual Texts in Postmodernity

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Abstract

This thesis provides a philosophical and media-theoretical enquiry about postmodern art-photography in the context of our current visual episteme. The aim of my argumentation is to show in what way both spheres are inextricably connected and influenced by each other. The theoretical tools for analysing contemporary photography are mainly drawn from French poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and feminism which have become standard features in cultural criticism and media studies. However, it seems important to pay attention to the question to what extent the theory (i.e. language) can explain the visual (i.e. photographic images), and vice versa how the visual takes effect on our language, e.g. as the light-metaphoric of reason.

Part one of the thesis contains an analysis of the writings of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, regarding their relevance for a 'theory' of visuality. Part two is dedicated to feminist theories, with special consideration of the much debated issue of pornography. Pornography is such an important battleground for the different strands of feminism because, for some, it represents patriarchal domination and abusive sexism whereas for others, it means freedom of speech and the right to control one's own fantasies.

Part three contains a close reading of Roland Barthes' famous text on photography *Camera Lucida*. To understand the deeper meaning of this fragmentary and 'unscientific' text it needs to be put in context with his former structuralist phase. Much contemporary photo-criticism uses certain elements from *Camera Lucida* without considering that it is not a photo theory as such. For them certain of his ideas have become standard jargon even though in Barthes' text they are transient and ambiguous concepts.

In part four I put the discussed theoretical concepts in context with some contemporary art-photographers. The aim is to present a broad variety of different photographic aesthetics which all relate to the current visual episteme. This, then, is the point where it makes sense to speak of a heuristic value of the discussed theory for an understanding of contemporary art-photography.

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Introduction

The title of this thesis' is of course an allusion to Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*, the third last book before his death in 1980. It is intended to be a reminder of the fact that he is still the most influential theorist of photography even though his writings were either only preliminary drafts for a future semiological understanding of it, or a rather eclectic compendium of philosophical, literary and art-historical ideas on the subject matter.

Barthes however is not at the centre of this thesis because he is only one of a number of thinkers who made an important contribution to the appreciation of photography as a cultural phenomenon that is, on an abstract level, an expression of the meaning society assigns to the visual sense in general. In order to comprehend the further implications of this condition, one has to question one of the most commonly accepted premises of the way human subjects interact with their sensuous surroundings, i.e. that our senses provide us with objective and unmediated raw-data about the external world. With this goes the assumption that the dynamics of the eye is a natural (biological) process which is not affected by the specific cultural variables of a society. According to this logic then, seeing as a biological a priori represents the ideal of an unmediated, instantaneous and absolute knowledge about certain aspects of the world.

This point of view is so deeply embedded in Western (philosophical) thinking that it requires special attention and careful 'archaeology' to acknowledge the vast number of visual metaphors that govern our language whenever we try to describe any kind of intellectual progress. The whole enlightenment metaphoric is just one such example, that is based on the image that something is brought into light, made visible, illuminated, revealed etc. This paradigmatic function of visuality, which Derrida called ocularcentric, has dominated the philosophical tradition from Plato onwards, but is now increasingly challenged by the 'linguistic turn' in 20th century philosophy. At the heart of the critique of ocularcentrism lies the assumption "that from the beginning language was already at work in the discoursive hegemony of vision, invisibly constructing models and paradigms of vision within the framework of diverse epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, and political programs."[1]

Nietzsche was among the first philosophers who explicitly asked his readers to 'learn to see' by abandoning any totalling viewpoint and instead letting the things and objects of the visible world show themselves in all their many-layered aspects, shapes, colours and 'intentions'. This, of course, contains already a programmatic formulation of what became one of the basic

premises in the phenomenologies of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Here, the strict division between (perceiving) subject and (perceived) object has, once and for all become untenable and was replaced by a less static model about the intangible sensuous interconnection between the individual and his/her world.

French post-structuralism is a vital development of this discourse about the linguistic 'construction' of human consciousness with special emphasis on the visual field (register). From there, I believe, it is only a minor step to acknowledge its possible contribution to the understanding of photography as a cultural phenomenon. Like vision, photography too is always already determined by what and how a society or culture wants to see certain things. This in turn can best be understood if one thinks of it not as a natural given but as a practise and technique that is an effect and product of the above mentioned paradigm of modernity: ocularcentrism. One further conclusion of this general condition is that photography is a medium mainly used to reinforce the prevalent values and attitudes of the respective society.

The main objective of this thesis though is not a general critique of photography, a questioning of the merits of the canonisation of its 'master-practitioners' or a condemnation of its utilisation by economy-driven fields such as advertising, fashion and pornography. Instead the aim is to focus on a field of contemporary (post-modern) art-photography which is, like French post-structuralism, highly aware of the implicit exclusions of the strict dichotomy between (perceiving) subject and (perceived) object. What is increasingly disregarded by this photographic strand is the clear division between the subject of the gaze (the photographer) and the object of the gaze (the model, the thing). At the basis of this transformation lies the realisation that this one-dimensional concept of the gaze is the premise for its proper functioning as 'gaze of surveillance', 'gaze of heterosexual desire', 'gaze of objectification', etc. This enables photography to become part of the deconstruction of ocularcentrism and to establish a way of seeing that is based on a more fluid and inclusive understanding of the gaze.

However, the key-term here is neither the metaphorical sense of visuality in philosophical discourse nor the meaning and validity of the medium photography as it is used to convey the paradigmatic messages of Western capitalism. What I intend to bring about is an awareness of a parallel movement or constellation between post-modern art-photography and philosophy in the wake of French post-structuralism, deconstruction and feminism. It is thereby very important to acknowledge that the theory does not explain the photographs and that the

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[1] David Michael Levin (ed.), *Sites of Vision. The Discoursive Construction of Sight in the History of Philosophy*, 3.

images are not meant to illustrate the text. There are links and associations, cross-overs and resemblances, shadows and reflections but no clear definitions and equations.

The main reason for this ambiguity and non-congruency lies of course in the fact that language and photographic images are still different media, despite the important influence of language on the way we look at our environment. For example, it is very tempting to suggest that Derrida's understanding of texts as 'free play of signifiers' is the same as Duane Michals' concept of the photographer as someone who is "a reflection photographing other reflections within a reflection."[2] Yet, it seems best to abstain from such equations because there is in fact no real vantage point from which to measure their validity. If there is an underlying theme that runs through the texts of the various theorists as well as the works of the photographers I am going to talk about, we could call it a general decentering.

In cinema-studies Jacques Lacan has long been a key figure, which is why it is not surprising that his theorems are also important for an understanding of the photographic gaze. This will be explored in chapter 1. The scopophilic drive, voyeurism and exhibitionism are main concepts in Freudian-based psychoanalysis, and this is, essentially, what photography also is about: seeing, searching, discovering, revealing, showing, hiding, exposing, camouflaging, tempting, seducing etc. Lacan thus provides us with a terminology that helps to understand the photographic practice (the psychological motives of photographer and model) as well as the photographic artefact, i.e. the printed image. The most interesting point of his theory in this regard is the phenomenologically inspired reversal of the central perspective organisation of visuality. In the spectacle of the world we are never completely in control of the gaze, because according to Lacan, we are also always looked-at beings: there is gaze everywhere.

Jacques Derrida's deconstruction (chapter 2) is an important contribution to the theoretical context of this thesis because he shows us that, like linguistic signs, the meaning of photographs (as well as individual elements within photographic images) depends largely on their relationship to other images. This is indeed one of the main characteristics of post-modern art-photography, where the individual image has lost its significance and self-sufficiency, and has instead become a mere 'reflection within a reflection'. Derrida's readings of photographs open up mind-twisting possibilities to interweave images with other images as well as images with narratives. One of the results of this approach is an implicit critique of photography's supposed neutrality and objectivity. If the meaning of images is determined by their visual and linguistic contexts, the search for 'the truth' seems to have become superfluous and futile. Imagination and reality can not clearly be separated, which in Derrida's view

[2] Duane Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 211.

seems less a flaw of the photographic apparatus but instead a rather adequate reflection of the human condition in general.

For Michel Foucault (chapter 3) seeing and the gaze are especially interesting cultural phenomenon because they play an important part in what he calls the 'discipline of the state'. In order to supervise and control its citizens, the various institutions of the state developed minute mechanisms of visual surveillance. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses Jeremy Bentham's 'revolutionary' architectural plan for a prison from 1787, called the panopticon, which is a prime example for such a construction where the state-power is represented by the exclusive right of an individual or small elite group to see everyone at any time in any place. This adoption of a god's eye view represents the whole power of the state which, according to Foucault's argument, is often sufficient to keep the population in a position of subordination. It does not seem difficult to draw the connection between this concept of the gaze of surveillance and the photographic gaze, which is obviously a perfect tool to record what has been surveyed. Meanwhile photo and video cameras are such common devices, used not only by state institutions like the police, military and secret service but also in many other spheres of our society, i.e. they have become central components of our public and private lives. If one attempts to understand the contemporary visual episteme and the supportive part photography plays in it, one has to ask questions such as: Who is behind and who is in front of the camera? Who has access to the stored visual data? Who has the power to choose photographic parameters such as perspective, framing, lighting, the pose etc. Who has access to what kind of technical equipment? Who decides into which category a photographic image fits? In Foucauldian terms these are not secondary factors but instead vital characteristics of his process-like concept of power.

Chapter 4 explores the relationship between the photographic gaze and the discourse of feminism, on the way to a deconstruction of pornography in chapter 5. The attention of feminism does not restrict itself to the writings of French feminists (which may otherwise seem to be a natural progression from the French male poststructuralists), but includes the vital contribution from American critics who have greatly influenced this theoretical genre.

Another reason for not limiting an exploration of feminism to the French theorists relates to feminism's inherent heterogeneity and diversity, which made it common custom to use its plural form and to generally speak of feminisms.[3] Besides the critical attitude towards misogyny and women's exploitation in sexist imagery, there are a number of other themes to be discussed, which also play an important part in the photographic works of contemporary

[3] See Christian Lutter, Markus Reisenleitner, *Cultural Studies. Eine Einführung*, 103.

feminist photographers. Concepts such as the differentiation between gender and sex, the questioning of supposedly natural characteristics of women, women's roles in patriarchal society, economic discrimination and sexual and physical abuse are only a few of the many subjects these photographers are concerned with. One of the goals, therefore, is to develop a 'female gaze', i.e. to explore a way of seeing that, in their own words, is not marked by phallic desire and male dominance.

The penultimate chapter is devoted to Roland Barthes who is not only another representative of French post-structuralist thinking, but whose writings on photography are still among the most quoted sources in the history, theory and critique of photography. I intend to show that these texts need to be seen in relation to the different 'scientific' phases of his long academic career. Only then is it possible to understand and appreciate the changed attitude of his last book *Camera Lucida*, which contains an implicit critique of his former structuralist approach towards photographic images. To do justice to what Barthes' calls the *studium* and the *punctum* of a photograph, it is necessary to be aware of the complexity and interconnectedness of these terms and the ambiguity of their content. The mistake of many contemporary writings on photography is that they use the terminology of the late (in his own words: moralist) Barthes as if the early and the later works exist as structural opposites. I intend to show that this misreading of Barthes ignores the paradoxical openness of the terms *studium-punctum*. Instead a closer reading of Barthes enables one to equate the terms *studium-punctum* with his semiological expression 'denoted-connoted' meaning of a photograph, which he had introduced in his early articles on photography.

By this stage the reader will hopefully be prepared with enough primary theory (i.e. discussion of the 'original' texts of the French theorists) in order to approach the concrete works of a number of contemporary photographers examined in chapter 7.[4] Even though it is clear that it is impossible to find photographs that could be explained by just one of the 'theories', it will become apparent that some photographers have – let us say – a stronger psychological or deconstructive momentum than others. Or to give another example, the works of feminist photographers like Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger should be viewed mainly in context with feminist theory and less under the premises of Barthes' text-theory. The large format landscapes of a Richard Misrach as we will see, tend to have more in common with Foucauldian 'Archaeology' than with Derrida's deconstructive 'play of signifiers'. To me it seems most important to abandon the search for definite explanations and instead try to find as many associations and links between theory and photographs as possible

and reflect on the effects they produce. The (en-vogue) term of 'the fragment' might best signify what I believe is the common ground between a 'theory of contemporary photography' and the photographic works themselves. Yet, as said before, the overall intention of this thesis is to put photography in the larger context of our visual episteme and ask accordingly: what is the condition of the post-modern gaze?

The question whether we are still living in modernity or whether it is necessary to add the prefix 'post' (to signify that a new political, economical and cultural regime has taken control) will not be discussed in depth even though it is an important and strongly debated issue in much philosophical and art-historical discourse. A complete definition and a clear delimitation of the two terms (modernity vs. postmodernity) is a related, yet different theme from the one at stake in this study. Focussing on French poststructuralist theory as one strand of postmodern theory presumes that a real difference exists, that 'something' has changed, albeit it is difficult to exactly determine what this 'something' is.[5]

One can roughly divide the differing positions on this topic in three main categories of which two are antagonistic, whereas the third one represents an attempt of understanding the two terms as inherently interwoven and non-exclusive. Jürgen Habermas is probably the best known representative of a philosophical strand which is very critical of any kinds of postmodernisms because he still sees the legitimacy and the necessity to continue disseminating basic modernist (enlightenment) rationality despite its apparent shortcomings and failures, especially in the wake of the political catastrophes of the 20th century. For him the project 'modernity' has not yet come to an end but offers still the most valuable answers and directives regarding the current socio-political problems in Western societies. Thus, it is not modernist rationality as such that has failed but its careless appropriation and application that led to the disastrous effects of its purely instrumentalist deployment. So far, Habermas' critical view of modernity is not fundamentally different from many postmodern thinkers who understand that the underlying rationality produces effects that can not be foreseen and controlled by this very same rationality ('dialectic of enlightenment'). For Habermas, however, the solution for this problem is not the abandonment of any instrumentalist rationality but to reconnect the highly specialised knowledge, produced in the various technological fields, with

[4] We should keep in mind that one of the purposes of this study is to re-examine this particular theoretical field that is so widely used by media-theorists and culture-critics.

[5] For some postmodernity is a recognition of the way that we have changed our cultural way of seeing and interpreting in the wake of the commercial subversion of representation. Postmodern can then be seen as a form of experiencing rather than a category for any object. This means that basically every object can become the source of an 'aesthetical' experience, regardless of its function. In a post-modern world the fictional image (social status) of an object or product is at least as important as its real use value.

the everyday of the majority of laypersons so as to install and secure a truly democratic and non-hierarchic basis for (political) decision making.

Yet, the problem persists that there are no effective means for controlling the unhindered flow of information between specialist (science) and layperson, institution of the state and its citizens, corporate management and ordinary worker, military leader and common soldier etc. In this respect Habermas' concept relies on unifying principles such as communicative mediation and democratic reason which are part of what his postmodern critics call the 'grand narrative' or 'meta-narrative' of modernity.

Some of the most challenging opponents of the program of a corrigible modernity include Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard who have emphatically urged for a break with any enlightenment notions. One of the key terms in Baudrillard's writings is the 'simulacrum' which stands for a general levelling of the differences between original and copy, reality and fiction (art), politics and simulation (entertainment), and history and an 'ontology of the double'.[6] This is especially important for a re-evaluation of the representational function of realism in the arts which has had a significant renaissance during the last twenty years. In Baudrillard's view the return of realism is thus not a revival of the past but the emergence of a second-degree reality: Hyperreality. The postmodern condition stores no definite criteria anymore for differentiating between (real) reality and (hyper-) reality, thus making possible the total aestheticisation of the real and the gradual realisation of the aesthetical. It is thus not surprising that the new media technologies that ensure the exchange between real and hyper-real are of such strategic importance. They have become more effective at the time when (avant-garde-) art as a fictional practise has largely lost its corrective and subversive thrust. In this sense, it could be said, that photography is one of the paradigmatic media of postmodernity because it continuously fluctuates between the two non-separable spheres.[7]

One philosophical strand that stands somewhere in between a neo-modernist and a strictly anti- or postmodernist position is that of Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida. They both recognise that to state the end of modernity and at the same time proclaim the dawn of a new era called 'postmodernity' would be imply a clear-cut demarcation between the two, rather than acknowledging that there are many historical and structural connections and topological similarities. Lyotard criticises Habermas' call for communicative mediation and unity as well as any postmodern forms of an 'anything goes' treatment of our increasingly

6 See Wolfgang Welsch, *Wege aus der Moderne. Schlüsseltexte der Postmoderne-Diskussion*, 28.

7 The fact that contemporary advertising photography can also often be seen in museums and on gallery walls and vice versa that in many instances, advertising imagery consists of art-photographs with the respective label or brand name attached clearly bespeaks this condition.

diversified and complex living environments. Interestingly though, he sees an important corrective to the unsuccessful call for stability (security) through unity or identity in a revised understanding of the Kantian concept of the 'sublime'. Of course, the sublime has always been an important subject in modernist art but it seems that only under postmodern conditions artists are prepared to let go of the last references to what is beyond any representability. Modernist abstract art still treated the sublime as a content, although in a negative way. This, according to Lyotard, has changed because for artists (and writers) it is now acceptable to purely dwell on the incommensurability between, on the one hand, imagination and sensuousness and on the other hand reason. In his 'classic' account on the postmodern condition he further says that work and text have the character of an undetermined event that 'plays' paradoxically in the anterior future (post-modo, Aorist).[8]

In the context of this study the term postmodernity signals the advent of an era that is phenomenologically different from, yet historiographically linked to modernity. The lack of a proper name is therefore not only an indication for a missing program and a non-locatable structure but also a sign for its dependency on a number of modernist features that differ from their original employment only through their altered contextualisation. It is, therefore, not trivial to emphasise that without modernity there would be no post-modernity. Postmodernity in this sense is the name for a development which moves away from modernity yet without a specific finality and direction. In a simplified way one might say that the postmodern condition is the result of modernity minus its underlying humanist, instrumentalist and historical finality.

In photography the beginning of the postmodern condition is paradoxically marked by the end of its history, i.e. its assessment and evaluation through historical categories (in the widest sense). Like the closely related term 'posthistoire', this changed attitude in contemporary photography is not an announcement of its exhaustion as a critical medium or an appeal to either abandon it or to send it into total arbitrariness. Instead, it means to understand and accept that the modernist avant-garde movements in photography still subscribed to certain standards which acted as gatekeepers to secure their status as (avant-garde) art. Critical, subversive, innovative, radical they were, but only within neatly defined boundaries. Straight photography had to be straight, photojournalism had to be journalistic, art-photography had to be artistic, subjective photography had to be truly subjective etc. or else it was thought to lack integrity and professionalism.

8 A very similar concept is expressed in Barthes' characterisation of the photograph as "a catastrophe which has already occurred." (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.)

This attitude is nowhere else more obviously enshrined than in the various credos and manifestos of these photographic schools and, of course, in the histories of photography which until recently were the most important theoretical commentaries on the medium. For means of illustration I would like to quote from an interview by Helmut Gernsheim, given as late as 1977, a time when postmodern photography was already well underway (which might explain the harsh and unforgiving tone of his judgements). The German-born Gernsheim, together with the American art-historian Beaumont Newhall, were considered to be the absolute authorities in their field. Each of them had published a major history of photography which were published in numerous editions. However, it is interesting to note that the vast and detailed technical and historical knowledge of their writings stands in such sharp contrast to the limited understanding of what the medium is capable of beyond the already established aesthetical expressiveness. The following rather lengthy quote is so valuable because it can be read as a negative program of postmodern photography. Everything that Gernsheim criticises has nowadays become a standard feature in (art-) photography.

> How would you detail your criticism of the young American photographers?
> Most of it lacks form and content, the essential ingredients of any art. Some is vulgar and tasteless, reflecting on the producer. Westerns, cheap crime and sex films and commercial television have debased American standards and have also led to a marked deterioration in European standards in the last twenty years. (...) There are too many snapshooters today clicking the shutter on utter banalities. This is, I think, my main criticism, this fetish of brainless snapshooting (...) or glorified banality, images that belong in, and any critical mind would consign to, the wastepaper basket. Every American teenager considers himself the producer of masterpieces worthy of an exhibition or a portfolio. (...) Apart from the snapshot and banality fetish, there is another American trend which we see a good deal in Europe. It is this so-called art photography, which is artificial picture-making in modern dress, frequently undress and in worse taste than anything the H. P. Robinson pictorial school ever committed to paper. Lastly, we have sequences that are not sequences in a picture-story sense but multiple repetitions of the same boring subject with meaningless variations.

> Maybe, when everyone is thoroughly sick of all this pop photography, a creative mind will emerge again.[9]

In the light of Gernsheim's account of a photography that does not feel compelled anymore to follow the traditional rules that emerged throughout its history, it seems remarkable that the prestigious *Turner* prize for the year 2001 was awarded to the German snapshot-photographer Wolfgang Tilmans.[10] Under the postmodern condition, even vulgar, tasteless, banal, artificial and repetitive images enter the spaces in museums and galleries, the front pages of advertising and fashion magazines and the pages of critical anthologies and media theories.

Even though histories of photography a la Gernsheim and Newhall are no longer paradigmatic approaches, the historiographic genre is still in use, although stripped of any of its former linearity and finality. Nowadays, it is often only a special (aesthetical, cultural, social) aspect of photography that is reconstructed through the course of its history.[11] The purpose of this theoretical genre has obviously changed. It does not repeat the grand narrative about the 'great' photographers and their artistic achievements anymore but puts a cultural 'object' at the centre of its focus, so as to ask how photography has helped to either maintain or deconstruct it. The body, realism, power, medicine, information flows, capitalism, politics, gender and sexuality are some of the subjects in contemporary histories of photography.

Translating Gernsheim's criticism about the then young American and European photographers into more general terms presents us an almost programmatic list of antagonistic terms whose deconstruction represents the red thread of this study. High art versus mass consumerism, educated taste versus intuitive desire, sophistication versus banality, purity of the medium versus mixed-media collage, linearity of the historical canon versus a pastiche of different styles and times, serious professionalism versus trendy pop-amateurism etc.

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9 Helmut Gernsheim, "Interview with Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper". *Dialog with Photography*. Edited by Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper.166.

10 Not all of Tilmans' images are de facto snapshots. The depicted scenes and situations are often arranged and composed, yet photographed in a fashion that makes them look like randomly taken snapshots.

11 Two such examples are John Pultz's *Photography and The Body*, and William A. Ewing's *The Body*. Both texts try to create a culturally orientated understanding of the human body through an account of the different ways photography has made images of it.

Part I

Chapter 1

Jacques Lacan: The Subject of Desire, the Unconscious and the Chain of Signifiers

Lacan's work is an inexhaustible source from which poststructuralist theory draws inspiration for the deconstruction of the modern notion of the subject, for an understanding of the production of meaning in texts and for a critique of the practices of psychoanalysis and the educational rituals of the traditional Freudian psychoanalytical schools. Therefore, psychoanalytical theory à la Lacan also plays an important part in contemporary analyses about a whole range of phenomenon in the field of visuality, including photography.

From the point of view of psychoanalysis, photographs (like any cultural artefact) can be treated like symptoms or expressions of the unconscious. It is therefore important to clarify some of the key concepts that enable us to gain access to a sphere of the psyche which is usually separated from consciousness.

Lacan's thinking shows the same form of self reflective or self-referential awareness which is an important moment of all post-structuralist discourse, irrespective whether the subject matter is 'the subject', 'the unconscious', 'transference', 'the play of signifiers' or 'the relationship between master and slave'. Discussing these phenomenon in speech or writing is at the same time their reproduction. This means that Lacan's discourse is not attempting to come up with an 'absolute understanding' of anything, because trying to comprehend the phenomena and processes in question through 'scientific' terms or mathematical formulas, can never be more than incomplete approximations. According to Lacan truth therefore, should not be understood as a transcendental ideal that one can access through privileged methodologies, but it will always be the product of specific discourses:

> You know only too well the everlasting disputes there are on every theme and on every subject, with greater or lesser ambiguity depending on the manifest discordance between the different symbolic systems. There is neither superposition, nor conjunction of these references - between them there are

> gaps, faults, rents. (...) Every emission of speech is always, up to a certain point, under an inner necessity to err.[12]

Lacan's relativistic notion of truth is especially critical of the Cartesian philosophical tradition for which 'pure thought' is supposed to represent a privileged ontological concept. This ontology functions as a guarantor for 'the Truth' in general as well as for the truth of the subject's 'existence' in particular. In general one could formulate that from Lacan's point of view, Descartes' error derived from his implicit belief that the 'I think therefore I am' is an utterance from a position outside the chain of signifiers as though this 'I' was both non-representing and non-represented.[13] In the language of visuality this would be like claiming to be capable of seeing ones own eyes without the aid of reflections. Descartes did not consider that the 'subject' of an articulation is generally not identical with the 'object' of that articulation despite the fact that, in his 'cogito', the subject and the object seem to be represented by the same signifier 'I'. Following Lacan, the subject does not exist in the register of the real because it is not represented, which is possible only through its integration into symbolic relationships (language). Since signifiers (as constituting elements of language) work through their differences, it is a necessary consequence that the symbolised subject is marked by similar differences. Hence Lacan's insistence on the subject's inherent and irreconcilable split (fissure, rift) which is also the reason why Descartes' paralogism needs to be altered into something like the following paradox: "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think."[14]

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[12] Jacques Lacan, *Reading Seminars I and II*, 264.

[13] I am referring here to Saussure's differentiation between signifier (acoustic image/linguistic unity), signified (meaning, concept), sign (synthesis of signifier and signified) and its referent (thing/object). Having in mind Derrida's deconstructive theory, based on Saussures' conception of language as a 'system of differences without positive entities', there is no doubt that Descartes - whilst saying 'I' - makes reference to other signifiers instead of something like the intelligible 'core' or 'origin' of the subject. Self-consciousness erroneously serves Descartes as insurance that the I who says 'I' is present at the same time with that I who is the 'meaning' of the articulated 'I'. In contrast to this view it is obvious that the phenomenon of self-consciousness is necessarily founded on the basic non-identity of the subject. The I who reflects on him or herself has to describe a circular movement at whose end she or he refers back to him or herself as different (other) from the original position. Derrida writes: "Immediacy is here the myth of consciousness. Speech and the consciousness of speech - that is to say consciousness simply as self-presence - are the phenomenon of an auto-affection lived as suppression of differance. That phenomenon, that presumed suppression of differance, that lived reduction of the opacity of the signifier, are the origin of what is called presence". (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 166.) Using Descartes' own method it is not difficult to show that his universal doubt must also include (his own) thinking (thought) and existence in any subjective fashion. There is no reason why the hypothetically imagined 'evil spirit' should not have initiated his thinking as well; in this scenario Descartes would merely be a thought of the 'evil spirit' who thinks himself as Descartes.

[14] Lacan, *Ecrits: A selection*, 166.
In his latest publication *Sphären 1. Blasen*, pp. 543-548, Peter Sloterdijk is criticising Lacan for the negativistic presumption (which is clearly visible in the mirror stadium) that a certain primary psychosis is the anthropological norm for every new-born, regardless of its specific living conditions. In contrast, Sloterdijk understands the rift within the subject (the fragmented self-image/perception) always as the effect of a disturbed interaction between child and its parents or care takers.
Without discussing the details of this critique, I believe it is possible to come to a conclusion that gives due credit to both positions. Sloterdijk is rightly emphasising that Lacan's theorem is obviously influenced by his catholic

According to Lacan the subject can be present with itself only in the imaginary because it is the only realm where this absolute immediacy is possible. Therefore, the mirror phase in early childhood seems to be the last 'normal' manifestation of the imaginary oneness in the place of the Other as a reflection.

The intrinsic division of the subject is also apparent in the effects of the non-uniform and conflicting partial-drives. In contrast to Descartes' concept of the subject as characterised by unity, truth and existence, at the base of Lacan's notion of the subject we are faced with 'division', 'absence', 'insatiable desire' and 'non-being'. Although in a certain sense there seems to be a universal trait inherent to this concept of desire, it does not represent a unifying principle or normative standard that allows us to determine the subject's (psychological) structure.[15] Desire is part of all psychological processes including that point where the subject becomes part of the differing registers of the symbolic and the imaginary. In the same way that Lacan subverts the relationship between subject and signifier by understanding the subject as effect of the signifier, he also reverses the connection between subject and desire. In his perspective the subject does not structure its desire but desire structures the subject in relation to prevailing cultural norms.

At the base of the subject we encounter a rift, an emptiness which is not accessible to the symbolic, because all attempts to structure 'the real' through language's basic tropes (metaphor and metonymy) have their origin in this lack. In the same way as signifiers can function only through delimitation from other signifiers, the subject too can come to existence (into being) only in relation to other subjects. According to Lacan, the subject receives the signifiers exclusively from the position of the Other.

> If the subject is what I say it is, namely the subject determined by language and speech, it follows that the subject, *in initio*, begins in the locus of the Other, in so far as it is there that the first signifier emerges. (...) The subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other. But, by this very fact, this subject – which, was previously nothing if not a subject coming into being – solidifies into a signifier.[16]

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upbringing and education and especially the psychosis-like experiences in his own analysis. (Another consequence of this might be Lacan's notorious tendency to invest his teachings with a cryptic and religious aura.) Yet, for my understanding it would still be wrong to dismiss Lacan's concept completely because it bears some very important insights into the general openness (vulnerability, sensitivity) of the human's psyche for that existential rift.

[15] For this matter see also Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Instead it has to be imagined as lacking any ordered structure, resembling a rhizome-like plant with underground root-interlaces which can become layers at any of its crossings. (See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Rhizom.*)

[16] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 198-9.

Instead of perceiving the subject as static and rationally structured we can think of it as being irrational and lacking definite borders which leads to a state where it becomes doubly alienated, viz. from its existence in the real and from the possibility to fully compensate for this lack through the symbolic.[17]

In Lacan's concept of desire the subject faces a third moment of alienation. Desire, he repeatedly emphasises, is neither an instinct nor a need but rather something similar to Freud's notion of the 'drive'. One of desire's characteristics is that it represents a constant urge that has an intra-psychic (inner-somatic) origin which can not be satisfied through appropriation or possession of the desired object alone, because there always remains a 'beyond' that is even more desirable, although at the same time unreachable. This 'beyond' could best be described in terms of a lack of being and as a lack of having which means, for example, (a) in regard to orality that the intake of food is not only a matter of ingesting it but also of 'oral pleasure', and (b) sexuality always involves more than mere reproduction of the species. Lacan writes:

> In any case, what makes us distinguish this satisfaction from the mere auto-eroticism of the erogenous zone is the object that we confuse too often with that upon which the drive closes – this object, which is in fact simply the presence of a hollow, a void, which can be occupied, Freud tells us, by any object, and whose agency we know only in the form of the lost object, the *petit a*. The *object petit a* is not the origin of the oral drive. It is not introduced as the original food, it is introduced from the fact that no food will ever satisfy the oral drive, except by circumventing the eternally lacking object.[18]

In analogy to Freud's concept of the 'partial-drives', desire too is always split, incomplete and non-uniform, surfacing only in a few registers and fields of the psyche. It never exists as an isolated and well defined phenomenon because it strongly resembles the Freudian libido in the sense of the most general and basic psychic energy. Lacan is not able to characterise it other than through the aforementioned negative terms 'existential lack' and 'impossible satisfaction' since no object exists that could fill that primary lack. In other words: Every 'object a' (the object that promises total satisfaction) has its absolute qualities only in the sphere of the imaginary, because the subject as an effect of desire resembles its fundamental structure, which is lack and absence instead of unity. I believe that in the end, this rather pessimistic concept can result in the liberation from such ideologies and norm-systems that consciously

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[17] In Derrida the 'real' also functions as a sign in relation to other signs and in relation to its opposite, and thereby is as empty as Lacan's subject. This is one of the features of linguistic ontology that stands the poststructuralists apart from structuralists, where the latter (unlike the former) assumes the real to lie outside the chain of signifiers.

[18] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 179.

exploit this double bind by re-enforcing the subject's feelings of lack and inadequacies whilst at the same time promising to possess the cure for it in the form of the 'object a'.[19] This understanding of desire also demonstrates that its positive and transcendental qualities are reaching far beyond law and morals where instead it plays a vital role in existence itself.[20]

In order to further develop our understanding of the concept of desire it seems helpful to discuss another closely related psychoanalytical term, viz. the unconscious. Lacan's exegesis of the Freudian unconsciousness shows us that it is not restricted to the primary process because it also affects the secondary process, where language, the ego and consciousness merge. One of the consequences according to Freud, is that one must assume that there is also consciousness within the primary process (e.g. signifieds of the primary process are accessible to consciousness in dreams).

Lacan's famous formulation " – *the unconscious is structured like a language* - "[21] is based on an analysis of the rhetorical dynamics at work in the Freudian primary process. He shows that in Freud's examples of dreams, slips and jokes, the symptoms of the unconscious are represented through metaphors and metonymies which are analogues to Freud's terms condensation and displacement. Describing these mechanisms in linguistic terms puts emphasis on the fact that they are not purely psychological but also direct effects of a language that is not necessarily marked by consciousness. In regard to the sphere of conscious articulations in language, Lacan adopts a Heideggerian position ('language speaks') because for him the subject is always submitted (subjected) to language. Experiences from the therapeutic setting further support his thesis that 'it speaks', whereby the 'it' refers to language as well as to the Freudian psychological topos 'the id'.

We can thus see that the unconscious and language are not two separate spheres if the unconscious is itself linguistically structured. Furthermore consciousness is not restricted to the sphere of the secondary process (reality principle) because it can also accompany signifieds of the primary process in dreams. In relation to the subject, language has to be understood as primary because language's inherent structures determine not only the way it speaks but also the its unconsciousness. It is thus no longer possible to think of the unconscious as an isolated sphere of the psyche whose symptoms surface only in dreams and neurotic or psychotic states of the mind, but instead it is part of any linguistic expression.

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[19] In Derrida as we will see, this lack and the drive to overcome it lies at the heart of 'logocentrism'.

[20] This kind of desire from 'Beyond the pleasure principle' is also one of the main causes for interruptions, transformations and subversions of much of traditional photo-aesthetics. As we are going to see in chapter 6, Roland Barthes discusses this dynamics in his 'text-theory' in terms of the difference between 'pleasure' and 'bliss', and in his writings on photography with the crucial differentiation between *studium* and *punctum*.

[21] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 20.

Consciousness is no security for the exclusion or absence of the unconscious. Thus the differentiation between conscious and unconscious speech turns out to be a construction that saves the apparently autonomous subject from facing the fact that the 'real' is inaccessible to the symbolic.[22] From this point of view one has to admit that language is no longer a secure domain for a society's standards of rationality.

Another way to understand the unconscious is to consider the concept of the origin of the signifier at the place of 'the Other'. Given that the unconscious is structured like a language, we come to the conclusion: " (T)he unconscious is the discourse of the Other,"[23] which is a formula that can also help to clarify the relation between the unconscious and desire. Desire too is always the desire of or for the Other, which is the reason why it is impossible to reach total fulfilment, because the place of the Other can obtain only to who is no longer an 'I'. The dynamics at work in what Lacan calls the 'mirror phase' demonstrates that fusing with the Other can happen only in the register of the imaginary. In a similar way, fusing with or knowing the unconscious remains impossible. The 'logic' of the unconscious is responsible for the fact that we can only come in contact with its symptoms, effects and various representations which are then no longer unconscious. I think it is obvious that we encounter another example of the differential moment of language because in this case it functions as a 'stand in' for something (in the form of a symptom or representation) that is absent (the unconsciousness).

The structuring of the unconsciousness like a language does not necessarily mean that this specific language is governed by the same rules or logic as the language we use in our conscious communication. Even Freud was unable to describe it other than in negative terms, e.g. that causality, time and the 'principle of the excluded third term' do not apply. In Lacan's understanding the general inaccessibility of the unconscious forces us to characterise it in terms that remain vague, ambiguous and ambivalent.

> Discontinuity, then, is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon – discontinuity, in which something is manifested as a vacillation. Now, if this discontinuity has this absolute, inaugural character, in the development of Freud's discovery, must we place it (...) against the background of a totality? Is the *one* anterior to discontinuity? I do not think so, and everything I have taught in recent years has tended to exclude this need for a closed *one* (...) You will grant me that the *one* that is introduced by the

[22] In order to express this idea without error, Derrida developed the practice of erasure. As such the real is inaccurate to the symbolic. (This practice will be explained in the next chapter).
[23] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 193.

> experience of the unconscious is the *one* of the split, of the stroke, of rupture. At this point, there springs up a misunderstood form of the *un*, the *Un* of the *Unbewusste*. Let us say that the limit of the *Unbewusste* is the *Unbegriff* – not the non-concept, but the concept of lack.[24]

This discontinuity could also be described as a flickering and pulsing which shows up in the rift of the unconscious for a split second before it vanishes again.

It is also important to consider the interdependence between the unconscious and desire particularly in relation to an exploration of the association between desire and the gaze (to be considered later). One of the main characteristics of these concepts is their mutual structural relationship with 'the Other'. In Lacan's formula desire is always 'the desire of the Other' whereas the unconscious is generally 'the discourse of the Other'. Desire's fate is to always miss its 'full' object because it can only ever seize that object's representation in the form of the 'object a'. If it did it would cease to be desire. In a similar way the unconsciousness is only accessible via its pre-conscious manifestations (symptoms) although not directly or without mediation. Comparing the dynamics of desire and the unconscious can lead one to the conclusion that the basic tropes of the unconscious: metonymy and metaphor, also constitute the two poles of desire. The metonymical side of desire appears in its substitution for the desired object which helps to ensure one's own existence through the presence of the Other. It is therefore the 'worthlessness' of the desired object that is the reason for the indefinite 'gliding' from one 'object a' to another one. (Lacan's definition of metonymy: from word to word).[25] The metaphorical pole of desire strives for the full object whose main function is to reconcile the original rift within the subject. A rift (fissure) which is similar to the loss of the signifier of one's own existence. This gap in the subject (that first signifier without signified) must necessarily remain unconscious which is a condition that Freud described through his concept of the primal repression. Hence desire's metaphorical character in the symbolic register which is an immediate consequence of the impossibility to 'posses' the first signifier other than through infinite substitutions with other signifiers (Lacan's definition of metaphor: a word for another). Therefore the metaphorical effect is a result of the tension between the signifier which has become suppressed, and its substitute.[26]

In this context it seems necessary to briefly discuss another psychoanalytical concept which is based on a complex dynamics of desire, viz. the phenomenon Freud called transference. Transference is the name for a process in the analytical setting which means the acting out of

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[24] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 25-6.
[25] See Gilbert Chaitkin, *Rhetoric & Culture in Lacan*, 170-72.
[26] See Peter Widmer, *Subversion des Begehrens*, 70-75.

the patient's unconscious desire in regard to the analyst, which is based on the belief that the analyst is 'the subject who knows'.[27] One of the therapeutic tasks then is to transform that erroneous belief into a 'promise' that the knowledge which is necessary for the patient's healing process is completely located in his or her own unconsciousness. Apart from the 'intellectual guidance' from the analyst, it is also his or her ability to resist the temptation of engaging in the offered complicity with the patient's desire that is one of the main elements in the therapeutic work. Lacan comments on this: "In persuading the other that he has that which may complement us, we assure ourselves of being able to continue to misunderstand precisely what we lack."[28] Again, desire becomes visible through the subject's search for the full (in this case 'knowing') object, thereby not recognising that the other lies within the patients own unconsciousness.[29]

The critical potential of this psychoanalytical communication-model lies in its ability to undermine institutionalised monopolies of knowledge including theories of visual interpretation, and thereby provide a basis for challenging those monopolies. Truth must be understood as depending on the desire for and control over the signifiers which supposedly reside within the other. Attempting to reach that 'sphere of knowledge' via the acceptance of the rules of the symbolic must necessarily fail because the subject who is on that search will finally become alienated from the originally desired object, which in this case is 'the truth'. This seems to be the way we have to understand Lacan's concept of 'the loss of language', because as soon as the subject tries to formulate his or her desire through language the object (of that desire) begins to vanish because of the demand for the Other.[30] The patient's unending search for his or her unconscious desires is also present in the sciences and the humanities, because here too the desired object (truth) is a metaphor for something that remains generally barred from the symbolic register. The constant search for truth is thus an expression of desire and can be understood psychoanalytically and even psychotherapeutically This condition forms the basis of Lacan's 'topic discourse-model' where truth functions as a marker for an abstract position that can be occupied by four different terms (The master-signifier, the knowledge, the object, the subject) in accordance with four different discourses (discourse of the master, discourse of the university, discourse of the hysteric, discourse of psychoanalysis).

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[27] Nowadays the concept of the counter-transference has become much more accepted by psychoanalysts who were formerly instructed to completely hold back their own subjectivity (feelings, thoughts) during the analytical setting. This change in attitude was mainly caused by the realisation that the traditional psychoanalytical rule that demanded the analyst's silence does not necessarily prevent his or her personality from becoming involved in the therapeutic process. (See Wolfgang Thomä, "Zur Theorie und Praxis von Übertragung und Gegenübertragung im Psychoanalytischen Pluralismus." *Psyche*. 820-72.)

[28] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 133.

[29] We 'know' deep down what we want, and in this sense the Other is also contained within the self.

Hence 'truth' does not mean the correspondence or resemblance between a judgement and an object as in many traditional theories of philosophy, but represents a lack within the subject which is the origin of a subjective reality. In Peter Widmer's words: "For Lacan truth is possible only through the production of metaphors because they create human reality by compensating the lack of being."[31]

Like the unconscious, the real too is comprehensible only in negative terms because it is that which can not be symbolised and is thus not accessible through language. That which we usually call reality is a fusion of the symbolic and the imaginary that leads to the constitution of phantasmatas.[32] This characterisation of truth, especially in connection with Lacan's concept of the real will be very helpful for a deeper understanding of the photographic image because it makes it possible to criticise photography in its traditional function as a medium that mimetically doubles reality. What seems to be the most realistic of all media is based on the equation of the real and the imaginary. Even though this tends to disguise the effects of the symbolic to a certain extent (Barthes has called the photograph a 'message without code'), the real as such remains inaccessible because it represents that sphere which is 'the other' of our cultural reality. In the moment when 'something' becomes perceivable as 'something-at-all' it is already under the siege of the first signifier. This deconstruction of the visual representation in the form of the photographic image can also be applied to a broader deconstruction of visuality in general.

1.1 Gaze and Look

The above introduction to Lacan's psychological semiology provides a valuable backdrop to an exploration of Lacan's concept of the gaze and its relation to the different registers of the psyche. Like the concepts of desire, the unconscious and the signifier, the gaze too has its other (unconscious, suppressed) functions and elements which Lacan attempts to uncover through a psychoanalytical understanding of the dynamics of visual perception. In analogy with his critique of Descartes' 'cogito', his subversion in the visual field aims at the structure of the central perspective, which positions the subject in the vanishing point of the Euclidean space. The basic premise for this structuring of the geometrical space and the way the subject perceives it, is the ontological differentiation between the visible world and the looking

[30] See Darian Leader and Judy Groves, *Lacan for Beginners*, 80-1.
[31] P. Widmer, *Subversion des Begehrens*, 130-1. [my translation]

subject, which is a position that encounters the same difficulties that exist in language in the relationship between signifier and signified or sign and referent. In this scenario the object in the visual field can only exist (be present) as appearance, which could be called the visual signified. That, which enables it to become a conscious impression is the corresponding signifier which invests it with recognisable characteristics such as contours and colours, light, contrast and movement etc. The combination of the object's appearance and the visual signifier is an analogy to the linguistic sign that refers to the thing or object 'out there'. Although the problem remains that there are no criteria that can assure us whether the subject's visual impression and its referent (the three-dimensional object) correspond with each other. However, if we are concerned with meaning relations as opposed to some truth search in relation to the visual field, then a lack of correspondence between visual sign and referent becomes less and less relevant. Indeed the very existence of a meaningful visual referent strikes the same deconstructive problems as the linguistic referent (to be discussed in the next chapter).

For Lacan one possible attempt to resolve this difficulty is represented by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, who pursues his critique of the hegemony of the eye through the introduction of the concept 'intentionality' to the process of visual perception and also through the emphasis of the dependency of the visible on something which Lacan calls "the seer's 'shoot' (pousse),"[33] which appears in the "pre-existence of a gaze"[34] that looks at us from every point in our visible surroundings. This unusual formulation is also an expression of the simple fact that the subject of the gaze can look at itself, although it is not possible to see one's own gaze.[35] Similar to the inability of our consciousness to be conscious of itself, it is impossible in the visual field to 'see-oneself-seeing-oneself'. In both cases one is inevitably caught a 'regressus ad infinitum' because even the view into the mirror does not represent a being-at-itself of visual perception. What appears like a seeing of one's own gaze is based on a copy of the gaze in the externality of the mirror image. What we thus see is another gaze, a kind of second degree gaze, if one is able to see a gaze at all and not only 'the eye'. This is another way of expressing Sartre's famous hypothesis that one can not see the eye if one is under the

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[32] We cannot know what lies beyond the symbolic, and truth tends to be something that is known.

[33] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 72.

[34] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 72.
This, however, also poses another problem for the subject, namely, "do I see my self when I look at my hand or arm or stomach?" – or is the self behind the gaze, or elsewhere, or absent ...

[35] See Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance*, 36.

spell of the gaze (someone else's or one's own), and if one sees the eye that is looking, the gaze as such disappears.[36]

I think that at this point it becomes important to consider the problem of the place of seeing, which means that we have to ask: where does seeing happen? 'Inside' the subject, at the object 'out there' or if neither of them applies, is it perhaps a 'place-less' process? Once we have become aware of the possible consequences of these questions, Lacan's above mentioned thesis that we are always looked at by the surrounding 'world' will sound less absurd and cryptic. It should be clear that Lacan's remarks on the dynamics and the complex interconnection between the gaze and the eye (seeing) describe parts of the psyche (the field of dreams and drives) and not the geometrical space. In this sense 'gaze' does not stand for a process of gaining objective knowledge but instead for a misjudgement in the form of a 'missing' and fading function that is a symbol in Lacan's psychology for castration anxiety. Lacan's interpretation of a dream from the beginning of the seventh chapter in Freud's book 'Interpretation of Dreams', together with his concept of the phenomenon 'mimicry' can illustrate the psychological meaning of the difficult term 'given-to-be-seen', which is so different from the way we perceive our (conscious) everyday-seeing. In an astute analysis of the dream about 'the burning child' Lacan is able to uncover a 'second reality' which, on the surface, looks like an accident even though it is a case of 'infinite repetition'.

Before we discuss Lacan's analysis of the dream I shall give a brief summary of its genealogy: A father has been sitting beside the death bed of his child for many days and nights until it finally dies of a fever. He then asks an old man to wake in order for him to get some rest. He falls asleep in the room next door and after a while he dreams, that "*his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?*"[37] The dream ends here because the father wakes up and realises that there is a fire in the room where the child's body is lying, which was caused by a falling candle. As a result of this accident some of the clothes of the child and one of its arms are slightly burned.

In Freud's interpretation, reality enters the scene through the shine of the fire that the father subconsciously noticed while he was dreaming. Lacan's metaphorical analysis though reveals another reality that is present in the (dream) image of the burning child. The fever which caused the child's death has to be understood as an 'inner burning' which is another metaphor for the concept of desire (viz. the desire of a child, that does not know that it lives in the desire

[36] In my view Lacan's critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's explanation of this exclusionary moment in the relation between eye and gaze misses the punch line of the argument and shows a strange incoherence with Lacan's own understanding of the structural difference between eye and gaze. (See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 84 and Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 258-60.)

[37] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 509.

of the father). The child's question "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" can thus be understood as an expression of the above mentioned lack, that general misjudgement that Lacan assigns to the gaze. "The gaze is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety. The eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field."[38] From the father's perspective it is the 'becoming-image' of the loved and lost object that reveals his desire, and yet (or rather therefore) he does not see, as the boy's words testify. This example can also show us that the function of the phantasmata (in this case the dream image) is to be a screen for a reality which is usually bared from consciousness.

The difference between eye and gaze is also a prominent theoretical position in Parveen Adams' interpretation of Michael Powell's movie *Peeping Tom*, which describes a similar relationship between a father and his son. In analogy to that meaningful first sentence of the boy in the dream, Adams' article is titled: "Father, can't you see I'm filming?"[39] Adam's work hypothesis is that both the wish to fulfil and to avert the father's 'jouissance'[40] represents the basic motive for the main character's (Mark Lewis) obsessive interest in film. Traumatised by his father's perverse sadism, disguised as scientific 'research', that Mark suffered from as a young child, he is now himself 'on the hunt' with his camera, viz. for a very specific gaze. As in all perverse-exhibitionistic and voyeuristic scenarios it is this specific gaze which takes on the status of the 'object a'. It serves as assurance of the intactness and thus the ability for a total

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[38] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 72-3.

[39] Parveen Adams, "Father, can't you see I'm filming." *Vision In Context.* Edited by Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay. 203-215.

It might be helpful to give a brief summary of the story of the film for readers who are not familiar with it. As a child Mark Lewis was used as a 'guinea pig' for the 'scientific' research of his father on the origin of anxiety in children. He was thus confronted with frightening situations and his reactions were captured on film. As an adult Mark works in a photo studio where he constructs and builds a film camera that has a concave mirror and a sharp blade attached to its tripod. This 'camera-weapon' enables him to film his victims whilst he kills them with the blade. The concave mirror has got the purpose to increase the 'look of horror' of his victims since they can see their distorted facial features not only through their fear but also by the concavity of the mirror. Yet Mark realises that all the terrified looks that he captures on film lack that something which could bring his murderous search to a halt. In his own strange and unarticulated way he states that it is 'the light that always fades too quickly'. When he meets his new neighbour Helen his behaviour takes a sudden turn. A feeling of sympathy (formerly unknown to him) for her child-like naivety prevents her from becoming the next victim of his deadly camera. His perverse desire changes almost to its opposite because he is now fighting the 'temptation' to pursue his search for the ultimate look of horror in her. Meeting Helen's mother is yet another disturbance of his routines. She is blind and therefore a priori bared from his scenario because she 'denies' the function of the concave mirror. Through meeting Helen and her mother, Mark finally realises that the fulfilment of his perverse desire is impossible. The last choice he has to escape from this dilemma is to commit suicide.

[40] Jouissance could be described as that which exceeds every pleasure or 'lust' to an extent that – at least for the conscious subject - turns it into its opposite: "The pleasure of jouissance - those orgasmic moments of excess - produce guilt because they necessarily challenge the morality of the conscious mind and the Law of the Symbolic". (Patrick Fuery, *Theories of Desire*, 32.) This also illustrates its relation with desire; jouissance is the hypothetical fulfilment of a desire that is unrestricted by the reality principle.

enjoyment (pleasure) of the person in whose name that desire is articulated. Therefore we have to ask: In which way does the combination of the murderous scenario and the complicated apparatus (camera-mirror-blade) provoke that specific gaze? It seems that again it is the division between eye (seeing) and gaze, because this gaze can function as 'object a' only as far as it expresses a certain fascination (pleasure and lust or disgust and fear). For an exhibitionist nothing can be more threatening than the victim's non-reaction, viz. if she sees nakedness instead of the phallus. The same holds true for Powell's film in which the main actor fails at a point when he is no longer able to provoke the gaze of horror (the taste of jouissance). Mark Lewis' aim is not merely to kill his victims and to document this happening on film, but instead it is the overwhelming need to catch that specific gaze which make the costly scenario necessary, including the killing. It is a gaze which has once been forced on him by his father and which has put himself too close to jouissance in order to support his father's (perverse) desire. This might also explain the above mentioned coexistence of aversion to, and fulfilment of, the father's desire.

I think that it is now possible to draw a first parallel between *Peeping Tom* and the dream about the burning child. It goes without saying that the dream contains much less material than Powell's film but there are still a number of basic correspondences which we need to emphasise. In both cases a child suffers from the desire of its father. In the dream we do not know how this was caused whereas in the film it is the father who forces the child to come in touch with his jouissance, disguised as scientific experiment. The child's accusation in the manifest content of the dream, its reproachful tone when it asks the father to see (to pay attention) has its analogy in Mark's way of behaving when he shows Helen the old documentary films that his father has made. Therefore Adams 'translates' correctly by insinuating the following words on him: Father, can't you see I'm filming? In the dream as well as in the film the father does not see the damage he causes, because his seeing is the expression of a perverse desire that is completely gaze.

The construction of the murderous camera with the lens, the distorting mirror and the deadly blade all in the same line, has its reason in the fact that, unconsciously, Mark tries to create conherence between seeing and gaze, which is typical for any perverse scenarios. (A similar situation can be found in the pornographic photograph where the direct eye contact between model and consumer functions as basis for both their illicit enjoyment.) This also explains why the confrontation with Helen's mother is so threatening for Mark's scenario. Because of her constitutive lack (her blindness) he is unable to convert her gaze into the 'object a' (through his terror) in order to assure him of the possession of the phallus. Although,

somehow the mother is still able to 'see' since she knows, or at least suspects, what the real motive for Mark's filming is. Adams writes: "This woman knows and 'sees'. She has 'seen' the darkroom through her nightly visits as she lies in her room below, and Mark Lewis remarks that she would know immediately if he were lying. Her 'seeing' is the screen of knowledge that he must pierce through in order to attain his jouissance."[41] The fact that in principle seeing and gaze never fully correspond might also explain why it is not absurd that there are a number of well received blind photographers who 'see' the world with their other senses and transfer their 'gaze' onto the camera.[42]

The term 'screen' is an important element in Lacan's 'theory of seeing' and thus also very helpful for the understanding of the photographic process. In a sense the photograph too is this screen that has got a 'beyond' which is different from the referent in the traditional sense. At the same time the position in front of the screen is not the equivalent of the gaze. Joan Copjec explains: "In Lacan, on the other hand, the gaze is located 'behind' the image, as that which fails to appear in it and thus as that which makes all its meanings suspect."[43] Barthes says something very similar in the first sentences of *Camera Lucida* where he writes about the fascination that looking at an image of Napoleon's younger brother had caused in him, because he came in touch with that gaze beyond the photograph (the screen): "I am looking at the eyes that looked at the Emperor."[44] The 'quantity' or degree of gaze in the photograph is an important criterion to evaluate its artistic merit. The 'more' gaze a photograph is able to express the more interesting and attractive it becomes for the viewer. In order to be effective the position of the gaze seems to play only a minor role, in the same way as this gaze does not necessarily has to stem from a concrete pair of eyes which are depicted in the photograph.

In the end the meaning of the 'it shows' of the dream images is the deprivation of the subject over his or her seeing. As a passive subject who follows the 'it shows' it is forced to take on a position from where it does not see. Lacan calls this also the "gliding of the subject" that necessarily has to follow the characteristic of the 'it shows', which are (inter alia) the "absence of horizon, the enclosure, of that which is contemplated in the waking state, and, also, the character of emergence, of contrast, of stain, of its images, the intensification of their

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[41] Parveen Adams, "Father, can't you see I'm filming?" *Vision in Context.* Edited by Brennan and Jay. 210.

[42] See for example the Slovenian photographer Evgen Bavcar who says about his visuality: "A general gaze is a total blindness. It is important to individualise the seen things, which is why I defend my way of looking. Someone who assumes to speak the truth just because he sees, is mistaken. I am in possession of another truth. It might be that others see more, but not as good as I do." (Evgen Bavcar, interview with Heinz-Norbert Jocks, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 9. November 1996, p.ZB3.) [my translation]

[43] Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 36.

[44] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 3.

colours."[45] How difficult it is to understand that the reversed process of seeing in dreams has its reason partly in the fact that, when we are awake, our conscious seeing does neither show the 'it-looks' nor the 'it-shows'. The phenomenon of mimicry is proof that in the 'spectacle of the world' we are beings which are always looked at, even though we are not aware of this condition. This 'being-looked-at' is different from Sartre's concept in *Being and Nothingness* in the way that it does not specifically refer to the Other, who surprises us with his or her gaze, but to a preconscious seeing without automatically provoking our own gaze. The subject is indeed confronted with a feeling of alienation, or with Sartre's word shame, exactly in that moment when our gaze is provoked. This should also help to explain in what fundamental way the process of seeing is directly related to our self-consciousness.

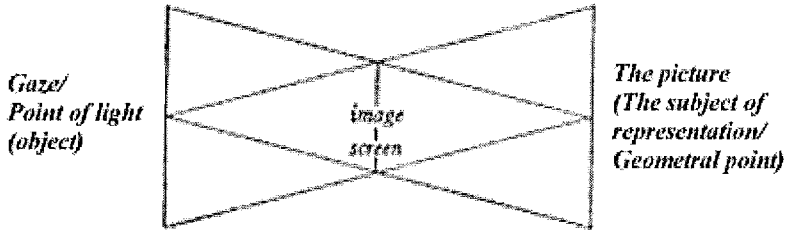
When Lacan states that it is out of question that our seeing happens 'outside' (perception is not within us but on or at the things) he refers once again to Merleau-Ponty who has written in his *Eye and Mind*:

> Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrusted into its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body. This way of turning things around, these antinomies, are different ways of saying that vision happens among, or is caught in, things - in that place where something visible undertakes to see, becomes visible for itself by virtue of the sight of things.[46]

This thought of Merleau-Ponty's is based on the premise that the classical Cartesian *Dioptic* is necessarily caught in a 'regressus ad infinitum' which begins at the retina of the human eye, because up until there it is possible to explain the process of seeing in purely optical-mechanical terms. The difficulties though begin when one tries to explain, how this optical image of an object becomes transformed into an idea of the mind. In order for this to be possible there needs to be a 'second eye', a seeing of a second order. Modern neuro-physiology too is unable to solve this general problem (matter/mind dualism) by tracing the electrical impulses from the retina to the different parts of the brain. In the end the question remains: "But how can a mind see anything? How can a res cogitans be effected by a res extensa?"[47] Consequently such understanding transforms the process of seeing into a thinking, viz. a kind of thinking that leads to the conclusion that the 'object-itself' and that other object, which

[45] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 75.
[46] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The primacy of perception*, 163.
[47] James Schmidt, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, 99.

consists only of reflected light-rays (the image) are connected by an external causality. Without resolving the problem in a logically coherent way, Merleau-Ponty keeps asking where to draw the line between eye (body) and world. One can neither say that the world is completely within ourselves, nor, that that we call 'I' belongs completely to the visible (external) world. His term for 'the sameness' of the matter that world and I are made of is 'flesh' which is a concept that neither means just physical matter, nor a kind of psychological or spiritual substance. Instead it is a term for "the sensible in the two-fold sense of what one senses and what senses."[48] In this context Lacan speaks of a substance without a name, "from which I, the seer, extract myself. From the toils (rets), or rays, (rais), if your prefer, of an iridescence of which I am at first a part, I emerge as eye, assuming, in a way, emergence from what I would like to call the function of seeingness (voyure)."[49] It is important to notice that the subject that rises from the ground of this substance (flesh) is not the 'second eye' ('seeing mind') of the classical optics, which exerts power over the seeing process through its ability to signify. By being both seeing and seen, the subject belongs to the tableau onto which light is projected as gaze. Furthermore, one can also say that the field of visuality too is structured like a rhizome. Instead of a straightforward one by one correspondence, gaze and light relate to one another through a network that Lacan describes as an overflowing bowl. Thus, the inside of the (human) eye is such a bowl that is filled with light that fractures and reflects it.[50] Lacan illustrates the dynamics between light and tableau with the image of two overlapping triangles (cones) where image and screen take on the same position.



The terms in brackets mark the structure of the classical seeing-pyramid whereas the others describe the relation between subject and light in the psyche's visual register. Lacan further illustrates his idea, that the light (the things) are gazing at us with the infamous short story

[48] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 402.
[49] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 82.
[50] See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 94.

about Petit-Jean.[51] Firstly, it is important to understand what Petit-Jean's words mean ('You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!'). At the level of the point of light the can is indeed gazing at Lacan because it is of concern to him that, in this moment and in the eyes of the others, he "was rather out of place in the picture."[52] While for him that journey had the meaning of an adventure, for the fishermen it merely meant another moment of their daily struggle for survival. Therefore he does not belong to them, is not part of their lives which is why he 'falls out of the image' (takes on the position of the blind spot). The conclusion he draws from this story is, that the subject is not constituted by having (present) representations of the object, but instead through a kind of dialogue with the 'gaze of the things', of which our seeing also represents a reactive part. Lacan: "In the scopic field, everything is articulated between two terms that act in an antinomic way – on the side of the things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them."[53] If we relate this to Lacan's hypothesis that the light (embodied as gaze) does indeed "photo-graph"[54] us, it should become clear that the concept about the reversed gaze also concerns the source of our consciousness. One has to ask: is consciousness a precondition which governs our visual experiences, or do we first see and then add consciousness to that impression? I believe that Lacan's text leaves no doubt that consciousness is a secondary moment of the seeing process because in the spectacle (tableau) of the world, we are always already 'looked-at' beings (concerned by the surrounding things). In this context Copjec makes the helpful suggestion to relate the second part of Lacan's term 'photo-graphed' not only to light but also to the 'graph of desire', thus emphasising the way light (the gaze) is able to evoke our desire.[55] In other words: The subject which seems to be in control of his or her visual impressions loses this autonomy when it acknowledges the supremacy of the light. Yet, this is a very similar dynamics to the one we have encountered in language where 'it speaks'. Accordingly, one can assume that the 'it-sees' resides in a visual field which is situated in the 'outside' (in the gaze of light). The second half of the term 'photo-graphed' relates to the signifier (γραφειν=writing).

It might not be superfluous to emphasise that the signifiers in the visual field do not correspond with, for example, the Kantian categories (or transcendental 'Anschauungen').

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[51] In his youth Lacan identified himself with the 'suppressed class', because he was searching for an immediate encounter between 'man' and 'nature'. Thus one day he found himself with a few others on a small fishing vessel full of expectations for that encounter to happen. Yet, instead of a thrilling survival training they experienced a sunny, calm and 'eventless' day. At one point Petit-Jean (a member of the crew) points out a sardine can on the water that is glittering in the sun. He remarks to Lacan: "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!" (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 95.)

[52] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 96.

[53] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 109.

[54] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 106.

[55] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 32.

While Kant's categories relate to an unknown object X, for Lacan this transcendental X does not exist because the real fraction is located within the subject and not between the object and its representation. "The veil of representation actually conceals nothing; there is nothing behind representation."[56] It is the fundamental lack at the core of the subject which causes it to imagine a 'beyond' the representations of the 'object a'.

This context also illustrates once again the difference between image and screen. While the image is constructed as a translucent point-by-point correspondence within the geometrical space, the screen appears to be a representation without signified that fractures and reflects the light, making it shimmer like the sardine in Lacan's encounter with the fishermen. The meaning of the screen is its ability to reorganise the whole tableau (visual field). Because it is directly related to the subject's desire it has the effect that, "in front of the picture, I am elided as subject of the geometral plane."[57] One of the reasons why this concept seems so difficult to understand are Lacan's unsystematic and arbitrary 'definitions', although it seems possible to represent the following three points as the main elements of his 'theory of seeing': a) Screen is the cross-section of the reversed 'seeing-pyramid' where the light (the gaze) is fractured. b) In the realm of animals the screen becomes effective as the phenomenon of mimicry and in humans through the deceitful play with masks (representations). c) Screen marks that place where the gaze hides and from which the subject is separated.

Lacan's alternative concept of the geometrical path of light also concerns photography at its base, viz. especially the medium (the camera). In the Euclidean space, the technical mechanism of the camera (obscura) can be understood as an ideal central-perspective image. Reducing the complex process of seeing to its purely optical components, the camera appears to be the ultimate analogy of the way the human eye functions. Contemporary art-photography though (more than any other photographic school, including the early modernist movements such as Bauhaus, Surrealism, Dada etc.), tries to deconstruct this 'one-dimensional' seeing. The resulting images are marked by the same sketchiness, fractions and fissures which are at the heart of the Lacanian subject. Furthermore, the photographer is not the second eye behind the camera's 'retina', which a strictly empirical understanding would suggest. The seeing of the photographer-subject happens 'outside', it is on, at and in-between the things as Merleau-Ponty remarks, and in the end, it seems to be the light itself that 'gazes' at him or her. The photographic depiction as such (the piece of paper) can function as the Lacanian tableau as well as screen. Thus post-modern photography pays attention to the paradoxical fact that a

[56] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 35.
[57] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 108.
See also Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 3.

photo is not necessarily an image. Using semiological terminology one could say that the subject, the gaze and the sense (meaning) are not the signified of the image.

Chapter 2

Deconstructing Presence – Derrida's Critique of 'Logocentrism'

The legitimacy of deconstructive readings of philosophical and literary texts is still an object of much polemic debate that often resembles the existential sharpness and blindness of creeds. Far from treating this discourse as marginal and unproductive, it rather shows us the necessity to adopt our own standpoint as soon as we seek to participate in it. From a deconstructive perspective the 'externality' of this division in, generally speaking, two antagonistic spheres could also be seen as a symptom of the metaphysical attitude which deconstruction attempts to reveal and subvert, i.e. the fundamental distinction of 'the world' in strictly (logically) binary oppositions.

Even though we are aware of it, to write about deconstruction involves a risk which can not completely be avoided. Strictly speaking, it would be impossible to describe or interpret deconstruction because interpretation (explanation, analysis, critique) is the kind of rhetoric of a long-standing metaphysical tradition that is the target of deconstructive readings. A systematic representation of the deconstructive practice would have the inevitable effect of erasing its subversive potential, which is to a large extent the effect of its 'irrationalism' and 'illogism'. Like any avant-garde it loses its status as a radical counter-movement the moment one attempts to explain, interpret, imitate, assimilate and finally obliterate its otherness. The only way to avoid this dilemma seems to be to continue with deconstruction's own project (to deconstruct text, films, photographs etc.), in order to provide a practical example of its workings. Yet, it is quite obvious that the modus of 'being-an-example' is necessarily based on the opposition between model and copy (representation/mimesis) and the 'natural' hierarchy between the two terms. Therefore it does not seem eligible to illustrate deconstruction either. Whatever interpretative 'tool' we choose, it seems as though there is no way to present a proper description of deconstruction without unwittingly contravening its fundamental 'principles'. Interestingly though, deconstruction offers a solution to this problem through its concept of 'writing under erasure' and offering its underbelly for deconstruction.

One of the cardinal problems that deconstruction (and philosophy in general) constantly has to deal with is the fact, that its object of study (language, concepts, text) is, at the same time, its own medium. Thus whenever deconstruction makes assertions about the functioning of language, it is obliged to apply these to its own usage of language as well, otherwise it would instantly lose its credibility. We find a simple example of this aporetic condition in the notorious principle of scepticism that states: 'There is no truth'. If this is a true sentence, there

must at least be one exception from its universal claim. Yet, being aware of the structural openness of linguistic signs does not mean that it can be avoided. In order to criticise or deconstruct language we have no choice other than using this very same language. One of Derrida's attempts to deal with this difficulty is his concept of 'writing under erasure'.

> This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.) (...) In examining familiar things we come to such unfamiliar conclusions that our very language is twisted and bent even as it guides us. Writing 'under erasure' is the mark of this contortion.[58]

Our attempt to explore and explain deconstruction in some of its characteristic aspects should be understood in a similar sense. If, and to what extent it might be possible to describe deconstructive practise is a problem, which could be marked through the crossing out of the term description.[59]

There are two reasons why we are going to look especially at Derrida's version of deconstruction: One of them is the fact that he is the foremost advocate of this philosophical 'school' (style, writing). The other reason is the thematic diversity of his deconstructive readings which are not only targeting Western 'logocentrism' (to be explained below), but also an extension of logocentrism in what might be called 'ocularcentrism'. The term 'ocularcentrism' describes the tendency within the current historical condition to give priority to visuality compared with the other sense perceptions.

In the chapter on feminism we are going to see that the deconstructive critique also tries to unveil the pre-conditions of the sense of seeing which plays such an important role for the maintenance of patriarchal power.[60] For the moment though, we should discuss Derrida's deconstruction of philosophy's partial blindness for the structures of its own language, i.e. a language that is strictly based on binary oppositions. For Derrida, looking at the two thousand years of Western philosophy shows us that the progressive development of a body of texts has always given priority to one element of these logical (binary) oppositions. Irrespective whether these oppositions relate to the terms being/non-being, rationality/irrationality, original/copy, philosophy/literature, truth/error, presence/absence, transcendental/empirical,

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[58] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Introduction." Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xiv.

[59] The difficulties in reading Derrida are quite similar to the ones of the previous chapter. Like Derrida, Lacan also resists being interpreted in a definite, unambiguous way that leads to universal truths. His language therefore, is packed with metaphors, metonymies, neologisms and dissected words that reproduce the transitory and process-like structure of the free associations of the psychoanalytical setting, the latent content of dreams etc.

good/evil etc., in each case the first term possesses higher value than its opposite, for ideological, historical, moral or religious reasons.

Derrida's main aim could thus be described as deconstructing (subverting) these hierarchies, by trying to do justice to the basic structuralist insight that terms (words, concepts) do not represent positive units (which exist in and for themselves). Instead all signs are constituted within a network of signifiers where they gather meaning only by referring to, and differing from other signs.[61] Terms therefore can not be understood as straight-forward derivatives of the 'thing' they refer to (in Derrida's writing: ~~thing~~), but rather as traces of a past presence. The term (the word) is neither a thing (that exists in-itself) nor the thought that it stands for. Only if word and thought were either the same, or at least present at the same time, a definite relation between term (signifier) and thought (signified) could be assumed. "The 'unmotivatedness' of the sign requires a synthesis in which the completely other is announced as such - without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity - within what is not it."[62] Thus the paradoxical situation appears that word (signifier) and meaning, concept, (signified) are not simultaneously present, even though they both require this as a pre-condition for them to have any meaning. A sequence of sounds or characters make sense only if they refer to specific thoughts, whereas thoughts are thinkable only under the condition that they acquire the form of a language. According to Derrida it does not make sense to assume a realm of thoughts which are not represented (articulated) through language. This is because thoughts are essentially utterances that are not uttered.

Derrida's primary concern is to emphasise the fact that the impossibility of synthesising the 'gap' between signifier and thought represents a basic structure of language. That word and thought do not coincide is thus not an exception (e.g. in writing, in fantasy, in madness) but the standard condition which regards all spheres of language. Marking something as something at all does not only require that the sign as such is already distinguished from all other signs, but furthermore that that which the mark refers to (the signified) is an element of

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[60] Despite the difficulties we encounter when substituting the term deconstruction for critique and vice versa, I believe it would be a loss to dismiss the latter one completely. From my understanding of the deconstructive 'method', critique is still a significant element of its modus operandi.

[61] For Saussure the random element in the formation of the signifier (acoustic image/linguistic unity) is also part of the synthesis between signifier and signified (the sign). Thus, the sign does not derive from its referent (the thing/object) but gathers meaning through its specific position within the whole sign system. A term can have meaning only by being different from all other terms (of a particular linguistic order). Therefore it has a specific meaning which no other term has and vice versa, and as such it can not have the same meaning of other (differing) terms. This dynamics proves that the meaning of terms is never 'natural' but always arbitrary and yet conventional. The languages of foreign cultures are not only foreign because they use different phonemes and graphemes, but also because they have terms for certain concepts that do not exist (have no meaning) in our culture.

[62] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 47.

a system of differences as well. Otherwise it could not be referred to by the sign. Derrida calls this general condition 'the play of differences' which is the reason for the impossibility to isolate a single element (of this network) that would be present as such. Derrida: "This interweaving results in each 'element' – phoneme or grapheme – being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text."[63] This conception of language as text with unlimited cross-references is Derrida's starting point for the deconstruction of that element of the philosophical tradition which he calls the metaphysics of presence.

In his view, the philosophical discourse from Plato through to Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger relied on postulating a transcendental signified that is based in the idea outside the chain of signifiers, that the fundamental meaning of being is being-present. Most of the fundamental terms of this philosophical discourse are mere derivatives of this 'philosophy of presence'. Irrespective whether it is the 'presence of self-consciousness', 'presence of the subject' (intentionality), 'presence of the other' as inter-subjectivity, truth and rationality as 'presence of the logos', 'presence of meaning' in speech and 'presence of visual perceptions' as eidos. To assume that something like 'pure presence' is possible at all (instead of 'presence' and 'absence') requires one to be oblivious to the general differentiality of language. In this context Gayatri Spivak reminds us of the fact that the linguistic sign too is an example of this paradoxical fissure. "Such is the strange 'being' of the sign: half of it always 'not there' and the other half always 'not that'. The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent."[64]

It is obvious why the traditional philosophical discourse had reasons to establish the above mentioned idea of presence, which mirrors the binary order of its basic categories. Without assuming an a priori which is independent from language, it would not be possible to legitimise an original hierarchy between the binary opposites e.g. enabling truth to hold primacy over false. The meaning of any term is comprehensible only through the relation to its opposite, yet by creating a concept of reality (something is real if it is present) which comprises only one side of the opposites, philosophers were able to disguise their subjective value judgements as 'objective categories'.

Plato is one of the most notorious philosophical figures who expressed this hierarchy through his theory of forms, which could also count as a founding text for that philosophical position which Derrida calls 'logocentrism'. The realm of forms (ideas) represents this a priori that lies

[63] Derrida, *Positions*, 26.

outside the symbolic and yet is accessible only through the logos (rationality) and which can best be expressed through spoken language. Thus, this a priori could also be described as a 'primordial thing' which causes thoughts (signifieds) to become present in consciousness through mediation of the voice (signifiers). It is obvious that within this system, script (writing) has got the status of a mere technical supplement to speech (which it re-presents). Since logos has vanished from script it has no longer any direct access to thought. In contrast to the spoken word it is cut off from a subject's consciousness. Hence the hierarchy of speech/writing.

It seems interesting to notice that in regard to writing, Plato had already recognised the aporetic fact that signifier and signified never fully coincide since they can not be present at the same time in the same consciousness. Therefore, writing can not offer authenticity and truth, but must instead be seen as the cause for misunderstanding and deception (thus Plato's hostility against the Sophists who favoured rhetoric over the intelligible logos). Even more surprising is Plato's implicit assumption that in (spoken) language it is possible for word and meaning to occur (be present) simultaneously. Consequently the speaker of a sentence must be fully aware of its meaning (it is immediately present in her/his consciousness), whereas the receiver of that utterance must be able to instantly comprehend the meaning of what has been said. Since in writing the subject of an utterance is not actually present she or he seems unable to control and, if necessary, correct the way the reader understands the original meaning of the text.

In general Derrida's deconstruction of this concept of language as a privileged access to the logos consists of the following two steps: Firstly, he tries to subvert the hierarchy between the opposing terms, thereby granting equivalence (equal value) to what has previously been the negative, erroneous and re-presented concept. Secondly, since deconstruction's final goal is to neutralise oppositions, this new hierarchy has to be undermined as well by showing that both their elements are generally present and absent. For Derrida even Saussure's *Discourse in General Linguistics* is marked by a certain logocentrism. Despite the fact that Saussure repeatedly emphasised that the linguistic science approaches language in its 'pure' form only (speech), he was forced time and again to refer to writing in order to illustrate the fundamental characteristics of language (e.g. the problem of how to imagine a 'pure differential unity'.) Characterising the most basic qualities of the linguistic sign in this way inevitably leads to the conclusion that writing functions in exactly the same manner. A word (acoustic image) can function as a sign only if it can be recognised as the same in different situations (at different

[64] Spivak, "Introduction." Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xvii.

times). Therefore it has to be repeatable (quotable), irrespective whether the 'receiver' of the sign knows its 'sender' (and his or her intentions). As Jonathan Culler remarks the most fundamental condition for language to function is its iterability.

> (A)s Derrida notes, 'If >writing< means inscription and especially the durable instituting of signs (and this is the only irreducible kernel of the concept of writing), then writing in general covers the entire domain of linguistic signs ... The very idea of institution, hence of the arbitrariness of the sign, is unthinkable prior to or outside the horizon of writing'. (...) Writing-in-general is an achi-écriture, an archi-writing or protowriting which is the condition of both speech and writing in the narrow sense.[65]

Derrida's name for the inherent moment of differentiality in language is 'differánce', which derives from the French verb différrer - to differ/to defer. It denotes the differentiality of the signifier as well as the deferment of meaning. The network of references that (spoken and written) language is made of, Derrida calls *traces*. This follows Freud's concept of perception.[66] Every one of these traces is merely another trace of another trace 'ad infinitum'.

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[65] Jonathan Culler, *Deconstruction*, 102.
Critics of deconstruction's concept of the sign tend to argue that the historical fact that spoken (phonetic) language existed for much longer than written (graphic) language is proof of the priority of speech over writing. (A fact that itself is debatable). John Ellis' *Against Deconstruction* is a prime example for this kind of argumentation. Interestingly, Ellis is able to carry out his critique only by insisting on a strictly literal interpretation of Derrida's term (archi-) script, thereby overlooking the many occasions where Derrida points out that his concept of writing is much more sophisticated. For example in *Of Grammatology* he states:

> The paradox to which attention must be paid is this: natural and universal writing, intelligible and nontemporal writing, is thus named by metaphor. A writing that is sensible, finite, and so on, is designated as writing in the literal sense; (...) Of course, this metaphor remains enigmatic and refers to a 'literal' meaning of writing as the first metaphor. This 'literal' meaning is yet unthought by the adherents of this discourse. It is not, therefore, a matter of inverting the literal meaning and the figurative meaning but of determining the 'literal' meaning of writing as metaphoricity itself." (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 15.)

Ellis' objections seem almost naive and defiant when we consider the frequency of Derrida paying attention to this concept in order to clarify his viewpoint. Ellis writes:

> First of all, Derrida's assertion that the idea of the institution of signs (...) is unthinkable before the *possibility* for writing achieves nothing whatever. To assert that as soon as speech arises, writing it down is possible, might *at best* be to argue for the *equal* status of speech and writing. (...) Even in admitting that speech cannot exist until writing is *possible*, Derrida is conceding the *logical* priority of speech, since it is speech's *existence* that makes writing *possible* (Ellis, *Against Deconstruction*, 23.)

This clearly illustrates that Ellis unwittingly delivers a prime example of Derrida's notion 'logocentrism', viz. by favouring the 'classical' connection between being (existence, presence) and acoustic image (signifier). In Ellis' perspective writing has the ability (function) to represent the spoken (original) word.

[66] Freud described the psychological process of perception in terms of an 'inscription in unconscious memory-traces', accessible to consciousness only through periodical cathetic innervations. The paradoxical situation appears that the System p-c (perception-consciousness) does not produce permanent traces because its innervations remain unconscious whilst the cathection of the unconscious traces are accompanied by consciousness. (See: Sigmund Freud, "The Mystic Writing-Pad." *Collected Works*, Vol.19, 231.) Spivak explains: "What we think of as 'perception' is always already an inscription. If the stimuli lead to permanent 'memory-traces' - marks which are not a part of conscious memory, and which will constitute the play of the psyche far removed from the time of the reception of the stimuli - there is no conscious perception." (Spivak,

Keeping this in mind one could formulate that all of Derrida's texts represent more or less an attempt to identify the dynamics at work in the many appearances of 'difference-in itself', whether it be as 'différance', 'supplement', 'dissemination', 'pharmakon', 'parerga' etc. Yet each of these terms represents only a provisional concept that can not be substituted by the others without significant changes of their respective meaning. By producing metaphors and metonymies instead of definitions of 'différance', Derrida escapes the risk of falling into the same trap that deconstruction tries to avoid, i.e. the creation of yet another term for the metaphysical master signifier 'presence'.

Even though deconstructive readings of texts do not intend to restore their original meaning (which the author might or might not have had in his or her mind), they are far from 'inventing' a solipsistic narrative that only serves the deconstructor's private mind set. This is because the real issue is to explore the intrinsic effects and structures of language. It is therefore also self-evident that deconstructive readings do not generate final and definite interpretations but instead remain open for an infinite number of interpretative variations. Christopher Norris comments on this topic.

> The end-point of deconstructive thought, as Derrida insists, is to recognise that there is no end to the interrogative play between text and text. Deconstruction can never have the final word because its insights are inevitably couched in a rhetoric which itself lies open to further deconstructive reading. (...) There is no meta-language.[67]

Critics of deconstruction often reproach it for logical inconstancy because it uses the same terms and categories which it criticises. Deconstruction, the argument goes, is forced to produce assertive statements even though it denies, at the same time, that they are true. I believe it is easy to show that this critique fails to appreciate deconstruction's awareness of the impossibility to replace traditional metaphysics and its system of oppositions through a non-binary and non-hierarchical order. Aspiring to create such order would again be an expression of giving priority to order (unity, system) over randomness (chaos, ambiguity). In my view, deconstructive practice is well prepared to face the challenge of language's self-referentiality

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"Introduction." Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.xl.) It seems that in Freud's concept a similar différance is at work as that which characterises Derrida's 'web of texts'. In conclusion one could say that consciousness and perception do not necessarily coincide (they are not present at the same time). Instead, consciousness is always connected to unconscious traces of past stimuli.

[67] Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction*, 84.

by constantly writing under erasure. It is therefore naive and unfairly biased if critics assume that deconstruction has to avoid coming under scrutiny of its own critical tools.[68]

One of the main flaws deconstruction is accused of results from a one-sided and biased understanding of Derrida's concept of 'différánce' or 'free play of the signifiers'. Instead of using it to avoid the obligation to produce definite and unambiguous interpretations of texts and images, it is often wilfully rendered into a reductio ad absurdum where nothing means anything at all. Under these circumstances, deconstructive readings would indeed be an unnecessary and superfluous practise without any further implications. Yet, even the slightest attempt to seriously apply the concept of différánce and all its inherent paradoxical effects, shows us that deconstruction is far from being just a frivolous and arbitrary 'game with words'.[69] Instead it requires as much detailed knowledge of, and responsible concern for, a text as any other interpretative (philosophical) method. Christopher Norris writes:

> (Derrida's) disregard for the conventional pieties of interpretation goes along with a meticulous attention to detail and a stubborn insistence on the letter of the text, its refusal to be explained away by any convenient means. Derrida's scepticism is not what some of his interpreters would make of it, a passport to limitless interpretative games of their own happy devising.[70]

I now intend to discuss some of the effects and consequences of Derrida's 'différánce' for the field of visuality (visual perception). The following paragraphs therefore, pay attention to a number of Derrida's texts that have as their subject matter, art-historical and aesthetical problems in general and also the more specific quest for an ontology of the photograph.

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[68] John Pettibone's text *Deconstructing the Deconstructors: The Politics of Anti-Photographic Criticism (A Metacritical Analysis)* is an example for this kind of critical stance. Even though I do not intend to analyse it in detail it seems easy to show that his elaborate, passionate and sometimes tiring text can also be deconstructed. While the first half of his book provides an eloquent and learned overview of post-modern and poststructuralist theory, the second part comes across as a slogan-like and undisguised anti-communism (anti-post-structuralism, anti-feminism). With all rhetorical means of a 'truth-bound' philosophical discourse, Pettibone tries to argue in favour of the (traditional) hierarchies between the following oppositions: museum-culture/sub-culture, modernity/post-modernity, history of photography/cultural criticism of photography, hermeneutic interpretation/deconstructive critique etc. Needless to say that his arguments also rely on a strictly 'literal' understanding of Derrida's concept 'archi-script', which again, is a mistake.

[69] Even Derrida has pointed out, particularly in interviews, that deconstruction is a method of challenging traditional power structures which rely on logocentric axioms. This challenge is, thereby, both political and practical, where the overturning of prejudices embedded in language is part of a broader political project. In this sense the effects of deconstruction lie outside the text in question, in the relationships between that text and the various other texts of a society or culture. An example of some of these texts may include the language and power relations upholding patriarchy, racism, fascism etc.

[70] Norris, *Deconstruction*, 127.

2.1 Dissemination of the Gaze

Derrida's stance regarding the status that Western culture accredits to visuality (the exchange of signifiers in the visual field) could be called 'anti-ocularcentric'. The term ocularcentric indicates the priority of the visual sense in relation to the other senses and its overwhelming presence in countless metaphors in our language, such as 'the clearness of thinking', 'the showing of reasons', 'focusing the attention', 'to speculate about a problem', 'to demonstrate a fact', 'to gain insight', 'to be blind to the truth', 'someone's worldview or perspective' etc. It is easy to comprehend that the visual sphere too is strictly divided in opposite elements of which one is assumed to have higher value than its other. In general one could formulate that everything which is located on the 'side of light' has got a positive meaning, whereas darkness is always associated with the underside of reason and rationality (enlightenment). The weight and cultural significance of this preoccupation of light over darkness can trace its roots to founding cultural texts including the book of Genesis where God said "Let there be light" and thus light was separated from darkness and given its positive relation to the Western psyche. This narrative may reflect an existing cultural prejudice, rather than instruct from a literal foundation – i.e. children are socialised not by the book of Genesis but by the complex of meaning relations they inherit when they learn to speak and to think. The meanings they are given at an early age as a set of foundations tend to be logocentric and ocularcentric in the case of a modern child. A deconstructive approach to the issues of both logocentrism and ocularcentrism may explore how logo and ocularcentrism can be disrupted from within language and visual narratives.

Despite Derrida's anti-ocularcentrism it would be wrong to call his attitude regarding visual phenomena as generally hostile and contemptuous. Deconstructive practice always includes the subversion of the former (first) subversion which leads to a state of ambiguity and non-hierarchical disorder. Using Derrida's terminology one could formulate that texts and images have to be read from the 'inside' and 'outside' in order to erase their content and make their style tumble, thereby situating them in a non-centred and rhizome-like web of free-floating signifiers.

Martin Jay's study *Downcast Eyes, the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* is a good example of the fact, that a critical attitude about truth, readability and meaning of any kind of visual phenomena does not necessarily lead to the general disparagement of visuality. (The visual is still on the deconstructive stage, only, it is no longer so privileged as to always occupy the centre.) Deconstruction's aim has never been to purify

visual perception from all possible deceptions, distortions over and under-exposures, refractions and scatterings but instead to heighten the awareness of their structural and existential necessity. It seems to make much more sense to accept the fact that visual perception always involves the visible and the invisible instead of insisting on their mutual exclusiveness.

In this context it is also worth mentioning once again John Pettibone's critique of the anti-ocularcentric (in his words: anti-photographic) discourse in post-structuralist French thinking. He assumes that the main aim of this 'subversive' and 'dangerous' school of thought is the destruction of photography and other visual arts and phenomena in favour of writing. Yet it is obvious that this interpretation is just another literal understanding of a concept that has in fact strong metaphorical connotations. Remarking that visual phenomena have to be 'read' like textual constructions, Derrida is not proposing a translation from an unreliable medium (e.g. photography) into a more faithful medium (writing). 'Reading an image' or other visual artefacts means, that they have to be deciphered or de-encrypted like all other sign-systems. Derrida's critique is not aiming at photography as such but at the misleading concept that photographic images convey meaning (truth, reality) in an non-mediated way. It is easy to show that Pettibone is caught in a contradictory claim because he himself insists on the right con-text, that is necessary to understand the 'proper' meaning of photographic images. In his view the photograph represents reality pure, yet what is needed to access this truth are the interpretative skills of the museum curator, or art historian, the author-photographer, the gracious museum visitor, the eager student or the professional critic. How can it be possible (one has to ask) that the truth of the depicted part of reality is not accessible to anyone? Only by ignoring the fact that all photographic images are loaded with connoted messages it seems possible to maintain faith "in the significance of the visual, and (...) its real-world documentary authenticity". This also includes the myth "that the truth comes from vision, from participation; it begins with the statement 'I was there'."[71]

One of Derrida's starting points for the deconstruction of ocularcentric visuality is the phenomenological understanding of shape (form, figure), which differs from other philosophical discourses in some significant ways. Shape and figure are generally assumed to be the basic units of visual perception which are present as such in our minds with the effect to generate 'raw' impressions. It seems thus natural to conclude that something can be perceived of as something at all only if it has a specific (identifiable) shape.[72] Yet, instead of

[71] Pettibone, *Deconstructing the Deconstructors*, p.216.

[72] A classical counter-example is Kant's concept of the sublime that cannot fully be grasped by our senses because it lacks a definite shape.

referring to an unconditioned a priori, it is obvious that this concept of shape too is possible only within a system of differences and oppositions. In Derrida's terminology: shape (form, figure) too is marked by différance. Jay writes in this context that Derrida "attributed the trace to the memory of an ever-receding origin that always remains elusively outside of what it produces in the present. The temporal spacing of the trace never leads to spatial simultaneity and full visibility, but rather to interminable delay (*différance* as deferral)."[73] This analysis of the differential element in sensuous perceptions is a strong indication that the rather naive positioning of a sensitive subject opposite a chaotic manifoldness 'out there' does not accurately describe the real conditions of visuality. The chaotic manifoldness can not be imagined (does not make sense) other than through opposing it with order, systematic or in this case with identifiable shape. Consequently neither chaos nor shape precede each other, i.e. neither of them represents an a priori condition. This can be described by referring to cross-cultural differences whereby what is presumed as 'order' by one culture may be chaos to another. The sense of order depends on situating manifoldness (parole) in a system (langue). If the system is not understood, chaos may prevail in the eyes of the beholder.

It is obvious that Derrida's notion of différance regarding our visuality is strongly related to Freud's concept of perception and its inherent moment of delay. (The origin of perception are unconscious traces of the mind which can only 'exist' in the past, because of the peculiar dynamics of our consciousness.) This process should illustrate the fact that no immediate intersection between 'world' and 'mind' exists and that the perception of something is fundamentally different from the perceived object (thing). The differentiation between sensuous subject and the perceived object presupposes what it seems to constitute. Subject and world, sensitivity and the perceived object, manifoldness and unity etc. are all marked by a basic différance. Therefore, to assume that shape, form and figure emerge from the ground of an amorphous (chaotic) manifoldness seems no solution for the problem of an always receding presence.[74]

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[73] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, 506.
Jay bolsters his statement by quoting the following paragraph from Derrida's *Of Grammatology*:

> *The (pure) trace is differance.* It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude. Although it *does not exist*, although it is never a *being-present* outside of all plenitude, its possibility is by rights anterior to all that one calls sign (...), concept or operation, motor or sensory. This differance is therefore not more sensible than intelligible" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 62.)

[74] Derrida's way of deconstructing visual material clearly shows that it is a mistake to assume that he favours language (text) over other sign-systems (e.g. visual material). His infamous remark: "There is nothing outside text [there is no outside-text]" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.) does not mean that there is nothing outside written discourse or script. This statement can be understood in a number of ways also. By referring to meaningful interpretations as 'texts' – visual, written, oral, sensual etc, and where objects 'exist' as 'things' only as part of a system of textual differences, it can be said that 'things' exist only as part of a text-system, within the order of the symbolic. Outside this symbolic order no 'thing' can exist: nothing outside the text.

Derrida's collection of essays *The Truth in Painting* contains a number of texts where he deconstructs the two classical aesthetic concepts 'parergon' (frame), in the sense it was given by Kant in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, and 'referent' (original) in the controversial meaning it has in Martin Heidegger's and Meyer Shapiro's dispute over a painting by Van Gogh. The latter study is of particular interest for us because it is a deconstructive critique of the concepts referentiality, authorship, intentionally and the origin of meaning in painting, which, in some essential points, is also true for photography.

In order to illustrate the somewhat difficult term 'the thingness of the thing' ('das Zeughafte des Zeuges') in his text *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,* Heidegger referred to a painting by Van Gogh although without the intention of giving a 'proper' art-historical analysis. Yet, Shapiro's article "The still life as a personal object" is a delayed response to, and critique of, Heidegger's interpretation where he accuses Heidegger of misunderstanding the proper indicative meaning of Van Gogh's painting. Heidegger was referring to a painting of a series of similar images, which, in his view, represented a pair of peasant shoes, or to be precise, the shoes of a peasant woman, even though, none of the eight pictures of the series that he could have referred to offers any unambiguous clues about the kinds of shoes they 'really' are. Instead, the titles of the paintings ('Old Shoes with Laces', 'Three Pairs of Shoes', or just 'The shoes') suggest a more general character. Furthermore, there are also no statements by Van Gogh that might provide the necessary information. So far, Shapiro seems to have good reasons to oppose Heidegger's view, yet, to our surprise he argues that the wrongly labelled 'peasant shoes' are in fact Van Gogh's own shoes, which he painted after he had left the countryside to live in Paris. Thus in Shapiro's view the painting represents (refers to) a real pair of Van Gogh's city shoes.

In his essay, Derrida attempts to show that neither position is sustainable, although it seems that Heidegger's mistake to give the object in Van Gogh's painting an overtly specific name has got a different reason than Shapiro's insistence on knowing the 'real' referent of the picture. Derrida begins his essay with the following simple questions: " - Here they are. I'll begin. What sort of shoes? What, shoes? Whose are the shoes? What are they made of? And even, who are they? Here they are, the questions, that's all."[75] As we have said, the picture that both Heidegger and Shapiro most likely might have referred to offers no definite clues about the sort of shoes it represents, i.e. to whom they belong to, whether they are 'a pair' at all, rather than two left or two right shoes, whether they are still in use, whether their only purpose was to be painted by Van Gogh, and also whether the shoes-as-such were the

[75] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 257.

intended meaning of his painting? Furthermore, we have to be aware of the difficulty in understanding whether the title is a direct expression of the content of the image? Derrida writes: "A title does not simply define the picture it's attached to (...). It can form part of the picture and play more than one role in it, provide more than one figure of rhetoric in it."[76] Yet, even in the case that the title would express the meaning and content of the image (peasant or city shoes) it would still be impossible to determine whether it is a painting of real or of imagined shoes.

Although on first sight it seems that Heidegger and Shapiro both made a similarly false connection between the content of the image and its referent, it is important to consider that Heidegger's aim was not to interpret or analyse this specific painting Van Gogh's, but instead to illustrate his existentialist notion 'the thingness of the thing'. This is the only reason why he referred to an old pair of shoes. The fact that he did this by using a visual representation of (possibly) peasant shoes makes the case more complicated but has otherwise no effect on the general meaning of Heidegger's text which is clearly philosophical and not art-historical.[77]

Derrida's remarks about Shapiro's critique of Heidegger show us that Shapiro relies on a number of tacit presumptions about the right use of painted shoes, without which his argument would immediately lose its thrust. They are: Firstly, shoes, whether they are 'real' or painted, always belong to a clearly identifiable person. In this case it is Van Gogh's signature which provides the proof for that link. Secondly, whether painted or real, the sole purpose of any shoe is 'to walk' if it is attached to its owner's foot and, thirdly, painted or real, feet always belong to a 'real' body.[78]

Derrida's text becomes almost comical in character when he shows us the inevitable consequences of Shapiro's insistence on concepts such as authorship, truth and unambiguous referentiality. One has to admit though that Shapiro's critique could have pointed out some difficulties in Heidegger's analysis if he had not repeated a similar mistake on an even larger scale. If he had argued that Heidegger's example (illustration) is based on an untenable hypothesis about the relationship between the painting and the object it depicts, Derrida would have had no reason for his polemical reply. The fact though that Shapiro criticised Heidegger's assumption because he believes that the depicted shoes are in reality Van Gogh's shoes turns his argument into a farce.

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[76] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 278.

[77] See Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 299.

[78] The last, rather strange statement Derrida's refers to a number of Surrealist paintings by Henry Magritte, which depict shoes that imitate the shape of feet, shoes seamlessly transforming into feet as well as feet that are deprived of a body which makes them look like shoes. The expression 'the right use' is, of course, a subtle reference to shoe-fetishism.

As we have seen, Shapiro's critique relies on the unproven 'facts' that the shoes are 'city-shoes' and that Van Gogh was living in Paris when he painted them. Derrida remarks about the first point that the shoes could either be country or city shoes because the painting does not offer any definite clues about that question. The abstract and uniform background could represent places in the countryside and in the city and the same ambiguity applies to the shape of the shoes. They are painted in such an abstract manner that it is impossible to decide whether they are 'made' for walking in the city or in the countryside. Furthermore, even if Van Gogh was living in Paris when he painted the shoes, would that necessarily mean that they have to be 'city-shoes'? Derrida writes: "Once in Paris Van Gogh could no longer paint peasant shoes or any shoes other than his own, or the shoes of nobody."[79] Shapiro though is not only determined to identify the kind of the shoes and to whose feet they belong to, but also to show that Heidegger not only misunderstood the proper meaning of the painting when he used it as an illustration for his ontological notion 'the thingness of the thing', but furthermore for not realising that the painting means (represents, expresses, refers to) the presence or being of Van Gogh because in his view, 'Old shoes with laces' is in fact a self-portrait of the painter!

Shapiro's critique is possible only under the premise that visual signs merge with their content in the same way as thoughts are supposed to fuse with the voice, and meaning with consciousness. Without this kind of co-presence there would be no measurement for 'the truth' or for any such unambiguous interpretations. Interestingly though, the same holds true for Derrida's deconstructive reading of the postponed dispute between Heidegger and Shapiro. He therefore writes at the end of his essay that despite everything that has been said, nobody is accused, damned, ridiculed or made to look suspicious. "There is painting, writing, restitutions, that's all. Who among you knows Van Gogh? Does anyone here know Heidegger? Goldstein? Shapiro? This Square - ."[80]

In most of Derrida's deconstructive readings the elimination of oppositions is not limited to single terms or sentences but also applies to the whole text or work. One could therefore ask whether it makes sense to differentiate between content and form, meaning and style, manifest and latent content of a work, and also between the work itself and its interpretation (explanation, critique, 'intuitive perception')? Furthermore, what is internal and what is external to the work? Where are its borders and what is marking them? Is the border (the frame / the parergon) an element of the work itself or is it part of the external surrounding?[81]

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[79] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 257.

[80] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 371.

[81] See Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 15-147. In this essay Derrida deconstructs the Kantian term 'parergon' by demonstrating that the enframing of a work of art is always both its border and an extension. It is part of its interiority and exteriority which means that it must be understood as the work itself as well as its supplement.

Does the work exist in-itself or does its being depend on, for example, someone's perception of it? If the work is a painting or a photograph, do we have to search for its meaning in the visual or linguistic register?

With this array of questions in mind we should return to Van Gogh's painting and the different ways Heidegger, Shapiro and Derrida perceived (interpreted) it. One can thus further ask: Do Shapiro's 'real shoes' (and the real Van Gogh) form part of the painting or are they just a necessary supplement? Does it make sense to strictly distinguish between Heidegger's idea of the painted shoes and the one that he tried to evoke in the fantasy (minds) of his readers? For Derrida the same undecideability governs the relationship between the material content of a work and its representation (reappearance) in the rhetoric or style of the way it is perceived or interpreted.[82] For example, the laces of the old shoes in Van Gogh's painting are not only a structural (visual) element of the picture as such, but also of the interpretations of Heidegger and Shapiro. In regard to both authors' differentiation between three modes-of-being of the object (thing) which is represented in front, within and behind the work, Derrida writes in his notoriously unstructured and paradoxical style:

> We shall articulate this *strophe* of the lace: in its rewinding passing and repassing through the eyelet of the thing, from outside to inside, from inside to outside, *on* the external surface and *under* the internal surface (and vice versa when this surface is turned inside out like the top of the left-hand shoe), it remains the 'same' right through, between right and left, shows itself and disappears (fort/da) in its regular traversing of the eyelet, it makes the thing sure of its gathering, the underneath tied up on top, the inside bound on the outside, by a law of stricture. (...) (T)he lace (inside-outside), half undone *in* the picture, also figures the relationship of the picture with its outside. The picture is caught in the lace which it yet seems to include as its part.[83]

To assume that the laces have no other (structural) purpose than to tie up the painted shoes, is possible only under the premise that there would be a 'natural' correspondence between the strict distinction between the work, the depicted (represented) content and the interpretative

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[82] At this point the critics of deconstruction usually reach the limit of their willingness to listen to its disturbing irrationality. This often leads to polemical remarks where deconstructive practices are labelled with notions such as 'obscurantism', 'intellectual rubbish', 'loss of communication' etc. One basic premise for these characterisations is to assume that deconstructive readings are possible only if the referential and denotative elements in language (sign-systems) are completely abandoned. Yet as Samuel Weber (amongst many) has pointed out the opposite is the case because deconstruction can reach its goal only "by pursuing and following such intentions out to the furthest point possible that their limitations and aporias can be made legible. This is why Derridean deconstructive readings are never simply arbitrary, why they never can be used to justify saying *'n' importe quoi'* or to argue for simple indeterminacy. It is only by reading as precisely as possible that the limits of precision can be remarked and put into play." (Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, 133.)

discourses and the somehow clearly demarcated and defined ontological spheres reality, fantasy, language, visuality and materiality.

2.2 Dames and Their Looks

Derrida has written specifically about photography only a few times, viz. in *The Truth in Painting* one can find a few allusions to Benjamin's famous critique of photography in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.* The commemorative article "Les Morts de Roland Barthes" also contains some interesting remarks on photography, although Derrida's most extensive and lucid exploration of the medium of photography is represented in a co-production between him and the Belgian photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart, titled *Droit de regards. Avec une lecture de Jacques Derrida.*[84] It comprises a photo-part that consists of one hundred photographs, followed by Derrida's 'lecture'. The photo-part contains no text (except for a few words which 'accidentally' appear in some of the images) and the lecture is not 'illustrated' with any of the photographs.

Derrida begins his text in the usual confusing manner with the following sentence: "You will never know, nor will you, all the stories I kept telling myself as I looked at these images."[85] In this sentence the French pronoun 'You' has got two different meanings. The first one means 'you' (readers) and the second the polite form of address. This opening-sentence outlines the basic structure of the whole essay because it is a performance of the differential moment (différance) of language. Derrida is not only speaking to his readers but also to his own reader-self (which is divided into a male and a female self). Therefore his text, which is presented in the strange form of a dialogue between the two 'yous', has got no definite addressee. The two speakers in this dialogue without names pursue very different goals at the same time. One of them is setting out to invent or create a traditional story-line of subjects acting and communicating with each other. The other voice insists on the impossibility to discover any sense and meaning other than through the analysis of the 'visual rhetoric' of the photographs' sequential order.[86] On first sight, the structure of the whole series of images

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[83] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 299 and 331.

[84] *Droit de Regard* is translated into English by David Willis as "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, Autumn 1989, 10-97.

[85] Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 4.

[86] This is the reason why I do not intend to give an overview, a summary or a précis of the visual material. The following few disjointed remarks seem to be all that I can say about it without falling into the 'interpretative trap': There is palace-like, almost unfurnished building that is inhabited by five women, two young girls and one man. Two of the women frequently make love to each other; they are photographed by a third woman who is going to be included in their relationship at a later point of the story. The photographs show the eight persons permanently

looks like a photo-novel which usually compensates for the muteness of photography by adding subtitles or speech bubble. In Plissart's images though, the absence of any accompanying text causes a tension or void, which forces the viewer to become part of the story's narrative. The discourse of the two protagonists in Derrida's text is always at the edge of a subjective interpretation that invests the images with meaning and its immediate deconstruction: "Words destined to be erased."[87]

The paradoxical situation arises so that in order to avoid consuming the photographs from a voyeur's perspective (the naked bodies, the beautiful faces, the magnificent building), one has to assign them with 'deeper' meaning by trying to invent more or less coherent stories. It is obvious though, that the photographs resist a consistent and systematic narrative because most of the different scenes and locations are only loosely connected. The alternative approach to this interpretative reading is represented by the voice in Derrida's dialogue which opts for a purely structural analysis. On a phenomenological level one could say that the photo-series features two different categories of props (parerga). Firstly those which are closely connected with the bodies of the models (e.g. rings, earrings, make up, clothes, hairstyle, cigarettes) and secondly, those that one could call the 'stage props' (i.e. mirrors, windows, picture frames, bottles, glasses, the hall- and stairways, the draughtboards, a big chest of drawers).

The several different cameras (mirror-reflex, Polaroid) that the models use, also seem to have another meaning in the formal relationships between objects and bodies. On the one hand possessing the camera automatically entitles her to observe and survey the others. Yet, at the same time the 'photographers' themselves are always photographed by Plissart who remains invisible, hiding behind the viewfinder of her camera. Often it is impossible to distinguish between the view of the photographer in the photo-essay and Plissart's view-from-outside. For a moment the viewer might believe that she or he is looking at one of Plissart's photographs that she has taken from an external position, yet in the next moment the same image appears again, though this time as a framed picture in the photo-series. Vice versa, a similar change of perspective occurs in images that show one of the women pointing the camera at one of the other models, yet to our surprise this image becomes then part of the next sequence in

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moving from room to room, from one storey or section of the large building to another (Figure 1). Splintering glass (picture frames, wine-glasses) and damaged and torn photographs are reoccurring themes. Another 'leitmotif' are photographs within photographs or mirrors which are not only taken by the photographer but also by several of the other woman. One of the five women is 'different' because of her strong androgynous appeal (e.g. she features a shaved head) and instead of constantly moving she often sits at a table and writes something down. Another important element of the whole series are the interactions between the two young girls who often lie on the diamond patterned floor where they play games of draught; in some images they wear exaggerated make up and smoke cigarettes.

[87] Derrida, *Right of Inspection*, 26.

Plissart's photo-series.[88] The looks and photographs become interchangeable because they have no point of reference. The position which, for a moment, seems located behind the camera will suddenly be in front of the lens. And in a similar way the photographed people, objects and buildings are always part of the 'real' story and also of the photo-essay. Therefore, each of the photos that appears in a photo might again be part of another photograph. These oscillating views make it hard to understand how Plissart was able to maintain the position behind the camera, because in images of the photo-essay which were taken by a person from within the story, one could imagine that Plissart becomes one of the models and a participant of the acting.[89]

This ambiguous position of the photographer is Derrida's starting point for the deconstruction of the traditional relationship between photographer and the photographed objects.

> A photographer is a priori a receiver too, thus an addressee of the photo being 'taken', unable to overcome a certain passivity with respect to it. So all such hypothetical subjects are in focus in this photographic genealogy. They are all photographed people, but also photographers, expert analysts of photography, signatories, spectators, addressees. What does the law say? Who has the right to watch the scene, to take possession of the images, to interpret them, frame them and edit them? Who has the right to invoke narratives? And to be believed?[90]

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[88] One of the most puzzling interference between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the photo-story (similar to the shoe laces in Van Gogh's painting) appears in a sequence that shows one of the young girls picking up a mounted photograph (that shows of one of the large column-halls) from its wall hanging, holding it above her head in order to toss it onto the ground. The next image shows a broken frame and broken glass (as expected) yet the image itself is not the same photo of the column-hall but a photo of the girl halfway through the movement of throwing that photograph (of the hall) onto the ground. The most baffling effect of this series of images is a reversed sense of time, because the shattered glass and frame are the result of something that the photograph shows that has yet to happen. (Figure 2)

This sequence in Plissart's photo-series is an excellent illustration of what Roland Barthes calls photography's unique tendency to forecast a catastrophe which has already occurred. (See chapter 6, p. 157). Furthermore it is an interesting example of what became Duane Michals trademark in his later photographic works which is an often uncanny encapsulation of photographs in photographs that leaves the viewer no point of reference with which to figure out which of the images refers to the (real) object. Michals' *Now becoming then* contains such a series of nine photographs where each image shows a slightly larger view (always of the same scene) than its predecessor. Michals delayed the 'punch-line' of the work right until the last image, which is identical with the first one. Because of the circular movement the photographic referent (in the outside, material world) seems to be suspended. (See Duane Michals, *Now Becoming Then*, n. pag.)

[89] Even though Plissart is not among the models, one still puzzles which of them she could be. It also lures the viewer of the photo narrative into the seductive possibility (fantasy) that they too are within the narrative and a participant of the 'acting'. This is because the interplay of images still leave the 'I'/'eye' out of the frame because it is the 'I'/'eye' who sees but is not seen itself.

[90] Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 36.

The way the protagonists in Derrida's dialogue talk to each other constantly questions the role of the author of the photo-series, because it is impossible to fuse the different positions that they represent.

The voice who interprets the depicted material preferably in structuralist terms, assumes that the bald-headed and androgynous woman, stands for the position of the author. The text that she writes in her 'diary' is visible to the viewer only in small fragments which form another piece of the 'over-dimensional game of draughts' that this photo-story performatively stands for.[91] It might help to read the expression 'game of draughts' in a similar way as the shoe laces in Van Gogh's painting, in order to understand its metonymical value for the fictional characters in Derrida's dialogue.

Abolishing the difference between a work's content and its form (style) enables them to focus on the analysis of the structure of the images, instead of having to search for sense and meaning that is determined by something external to them (e.g. the author's intention). Thus one of the voices in Derrida's text understands the sequences where the two girls play games of draughts also as a metonymy for the rituals of the girls to dress up as adults, or to be more specific, as adult ladies ('draughts') by using make up, smoking cigarettes, wearing adult clothing, and imitating adult behaviour. The 'laws' (rules) of the game which govern the moves of the figures are another element that is mirrored in the sequential appearance of the photo-story. Another significant congruence between a draughtboard and the photo-sequence is the number of the squares of the board and the number of photographs in Plissart's work. One of Derrida's voices thus remarks: "(...) and if you count the back but not the front cover, you have a hundred pages, a hundred plates of the photographic scene: the hundred squares of a draughtboard."[92]

What appears to be a game of draughts within a game of draughts has the same dynamics as the complex appearances of photographs in photographs. It is thus impossible to ascertain whether the game of draughts played by the two girls is a metaphor for the whole photo-series, or whether it represents the girls' inability to comprehend the way the other women interact other than in terms of a game which is about victory and defeat, winning power and positions etc. Derrida's deconstructive dialogue oscillates between a structural and

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[91] Although the viewer is able to glimpse only at a few pieces of the androgynous woman's hand-writing, it is still possible to guess what her text is about (even if one does not understand Spanish): "horror ... duplicació o multiplicación espectral de la realidad ... persecución des mis actos, su pantomima cósmica, eran sobrenaturales (...) a divergir de la realidad". (Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 41. Figure 3)

It might be more adequate to call her the game's 'dame' instead (of the author), who has reached the end of the opponent's field and is therefore eligible to move in all directions and also taking as many steps as s/he wishes. Thus she is still bound to the rules of the game like all the other 'figures, yet she's got greater strategic powers than them.

interpretative reading without favouring one of these options, because he seeks to tell as many 'stories' as possible, assuming that they are equally 'true'. One of Derrida's voices thus says: "You talk too much, you recounter, describe, imagine what is being said, interpret, filter, your eyes are closed, you are dreaming ... "[93] Despite their cautiousness the two opponents start giving the models fictitious names which contain a large number of further associations. (For example, the young girls are called Marie and Virginie, recalling the 'Virgin Mary' etc.) Surprisingly, the voice that objects to analysing the photographs in strict formal terms, admits her subjective motives for giving them names: "They are too attractive and desirable for me to resist naming them."[94] As soon as one gives the figures names, they appear to be caught in a complex network of interactions, including emotional outbursts of desire and dramatic moments of love, hate and homosexual intimacy. Despite the names though, it is still not possible to determine whether the images are documentary photographs or staged. In case they are set up for the camera, one still needed to ask questions such as: Who is the author of the photo-series? The androgynous woman, Plissart, the other models or Derrida?. Is it possible that the images show 'real' relations between the models despite their fictitious character? What is the relationship between the three women and Marie and Virginie? What is the role of the only man in this ensemble of actors? What is the meaning of the vast and empty building, that appears so unoccupied.

In the end the voice in Derrida's dialogue which tries to find answers for all these questions has to admit that the work as such does not provide any definite clues for a coherent story or interpretation. Instead it is her or his subjective intention that is the only (or at least the main) source of the narration. The fact that the photographs do not 'speak' is mirrored by the peculiarity that, apparently, the models do not talk to each other. They are not showing the adequate gestures of communication. Instead the images are filled with movement and hovering looks, people leaving rooms to hasten over the 'squares' of the building to enter other parts of it, constantly watched by the eyes or cameras of the other models.

The structure of Plissart's fragmentary photographs is echoed within the story through a frequent appearance of photographs that have been torn to pieces (Figure 4). (If we were faithful to Derrida's notion of the fragment, it needed to be erased because it presupposes a preceding unity or wholeness.) From a deconstructive point of view though, the photographs had a fragmentary character even before they were ripped apart, in the same way as the models' behaviour was disjointed and incoherent even before the camera did its specific work

[92] Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 39.
[93] Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 50.
[94] Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 61.

of cutting the continuos flow of time into small sections. Even in the case that a prior unity existed (for example in the form of a script written by the 'photographer-author' Plissart), it would be impossible to infer from the photographs whether they truthfully convey her original intention, message or story.

It is compelling to realise that it is impossible to view the photographs without situating them in symbolic relations. Even a simple remark like 'One of the women leaves the room' (regardless whether written, spoken or thought) is always already a synthesis of the imaginary (the image) and the symbolic. "There is no perception of a natural or naturally present reality. We thus learn that looking has nothing to do with perception, it doesn't see."[95] It is therefore questionable whether the voice which represents the structural analysis of the dispute really achieves her or his goal of not entering the symbolic. The question remains of where to draw the line between a purely visual (formal, structural) description and a subjective interpretation or narration of the story-line? Needless to say, Derrida is well aware of this problem and the two opponents in the fictitious dispute end their debate in a stalemate.

The last question we might ask is whether the title "Right of inspection", which carries the signature of the photographer Plissart, represents a secure point of reference for an interpretation of the photographs? Again, I believe that ambiguity precludes any 'proper' analyses and definite understanding. Usually the photographer has the right to inspect (possess) what he or she captures on film by turning it into an object of his or her gaze. In that traditional relationship between photographer and model, it is the photographer's role to create a tableau or scene from which he or she is excluded.[96] Even though, at first sight, Plissart's work seems to be structured in this fashion, it assigns the right of inspection also to other 'agents' than herself, i.e. to the different cameras and eyes of the models which observe every movement of the others.[97] And, of course, we the readers and viewers are another instance of the position of looking and observing. Derrida writes:

> Therefore anybody at all, provided they are skilled in looking, has a right of inspection and thus a right to interpret whatever they take into view. (...) Thus one can give names, lend voices, make implications. The polylogue we are

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[95] Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 53.
Derrida's remark seems almost like a quotation of Lacan's concept of the difference between gaze and seeing.

[96] One of the significant trends in postmodern (art-) photography is that photographers become part of the tableau they photograph. Cindy Sherman is probably one of the most notorious examples of a photographer who abolishes the difference between her and model.

[97] For Derrida the writing of the androgynous woman has a purpose similar to that of Plissart's camera: "Like a writer-photographer or director-photographer, she arranges the pieces in her camera for one or more games, plays with herself while directing the play (...)" (Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 84.) Derrida alludes to the equivocalness of the terms 'camera' = camera/chamber and 'developing' = to develop a photograph/to develop a character in a story.

involved in here does indeed presuppose that a right of inspection had been entrusted to us. An offer was made to us.[98]

It might not be superfluous to repeat that Derrida's lecture is no 'theory of photography' in any traditional sense. Except for a short quote from Barthes' *Camera Lucida* that emphasises the essential link of photographs to their referents (the photographed objects), the polylogue is not based on any ontological or aesthetical principles and rules. Even though the protagonists in Derrida's lecture are compelled to speak in philosophical, art-historical, psychoanalytical and prosaic terms, they do so without concern for their 'true' meanings. Therefore, at the end of the text one of the voices admits to the possibility that the whole photo-sequence might have been a 'primary scene', dreamt or hallucinated by Dominique and Claude. Consequently nothing might have happened in reality, they might not even be real photographs. "Everything could have been photographed, exposed, developed, fixed behind the shutter of their eyelids (called a 'hymen' in certain birds), in the bedroom, between two embraces."[99] (Figure 5).

[98] Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 82.
[99] Derrida, "Right of Inspection." *Art & Text* 32, 90.

Chapter 3

Michel Foucault's Genealogy of the Modern Subject

Of the theorists considered so far, Foucault's voluminous work has probably the most obvious relevance for our inquiry of the photographic process, because of its strong anthropological character. Like Lacan and Derrida, Foucault has not written extensively about photography.[100] Instead he has paid attention to the broader question of the meaning of visual perception for the genesis of the modern subject. As with the last two chapters my aim is to provide an introductory overview followed by a discussion of more specific texts, where Foucault is concerned with the meaning of the term 'representation' in the context of classical and modern painting. This will provide a conceptual basis for the use of Foucault's thinking in order to understand the characteristics of the photographic seeing.

Foucault's work differs markedly from that of Lacan (and to some extent Derrida) through the emphasis he places on the political dimensions and implications of his anthropological analyses, especially noticeable in his political statements as a member of the "Group for Prison Information" and in his countless interviews and articles on current affairs. One could characterise his scientific approach (style, methodology) as almost anti-philosophical. It is thus not surprising that his intellectual influence flourished mainly in the social- and human sciences and less in philosophical circles. In the course of Foucault's increasing popularity Anglo-Saxon (especially North-American) analytical philosophy cultivated an aversion against his unconventional methods into a pejorative hostility. Critical statements span from the assumption that Foucault has nothing of importance to say in regard to epistemology and philosophical theories of truth, to the personally biased request not to read his texts to maintain one's 'intellectual hygiene'.[101] Considering the general antagonism between Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy and European (continental) philosophy which has its roots in Nietzsche and Heidegger, helps to shed light on this negative attitude. Having often referred to himself as 'Nietzschean' and 'Heideggerian', it is no wonder that Foucault is criticised with similar arguments as his (in-) famous predecessors. Foucault's image as co-founder of postmodern discourse might be another reason for the disrespect and hostility his work

[100] To my knowledge there is only one text where Foucault writes about the concrete work of a photographer. It is a short essay which is part of (the homosexual photographer) Duane Michals' retrospective "La Pensée, L'Emotion." *Duane Michals: Photographies de 1958 à 1982 Paris*. Paris: Audiovisual, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1982.

[101] See C. G. Prado, *Starting with Foucault*, 1-3.

receives from analytical philosophers.[102] Furthermore Foucault's political commitment makes him prone to be accused of diluting analytical philosophy's purely 'objective' ways of problem-solving by introducing anthropological, political, psychological, and historical issues. In the course of this chapter it should become apparent that Foucault and Derrida are criticised in a similar fashion, because both face logical difficulties in regard to the status of the language used in their critical and deconstructive allegations.

In contrast to the analytical philosophic tradition one finds a very productive reception and further use of Foucault's thinking in the human and social sciences. The spectrum of disciplines that consider and appropriate his complex work stretches from political science and sociology to ethnology, feminism, literature and cultural- and media studies (including film-theory and the history of photography). Many of the recently published inquiries of visuality which examine the change of meaning of visual perception from the rise of modernity to its inflation in post-modernity, owe their methods in one way or another to the kind of relativism that forms a fundamental undercurrent in Foucault's archaeological and later genealogical approach.[103]

3.1 The Concept of Truth

Fundamental to Foucault's thought is a general qualification of basic philosophical terms such as truth, knowledge, the subject and reality. It is especially through the rejection of a notion of absolute truth that his direct descent from Nietzsche becomes apparent. Like Nietzsche, Foucault argues that truth is always the outcome of specific discoursive factors which form the episteme of a specific time and society. Such truth is not deriving from a transcendental source because the discoursive factors themselves determine the conditions under which

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[102] Of which many regard postmodernism as a fashionable and sterile exercise in unstructured self-reflection and eloquent polemics without any serious philosophical outcomes.

[103] Appropriating Foucault's methodology my intention is to demonstrate that contemporary photography is a practice and visual discourse, which is historically contingent and whose epistemology is shaped by a many-layered and all-embracing network of power-relations and economical interests. This is in sharp contrast to the traditional art historical view of photography as a cumulative and progressing development of artistic expression and technical skill.

Even though my inquiry is focussing on post-modern photography (roughly spanning a period of about thirty years) it would be possible to discover the same characteristics of contingency and discoursivity in any other moment in the history of photography. My quasi-synchronistic analysis presupposes a previous diachronic analysis without which the notion of change would not make sense. Foucault's archaeological texts are also showing us that the diachronic (historical) perspective is no (metaphysical) base or ground for the analysis of a given moment in time. Instead he tries to qualify the notion of historical progress by showing that it is based on a projection of contemporary values into the past.

A case in point is Thomas Kuhn's work which exposes the transformations in modern scientific epistemologies as the product of ceaseless 'paradigm shifts'.

something is considered to be true. According to Nietzsche and Foucault, the concept of truth itself is a linguistic product and can therefore not function as an extra-linguistic a priori, which would represent a definite point of reference for the different disciplines of knowledge. (As was the hope in Neo-Platonic thought in general and analytical philosophy in particular). The frame of reference within which different cultures (at different times) produce 'true' discourses is always based in the more or less arbitrary way to privilege certain methods (e.g. science) and their possible objects (e.g. matter), which automatically excludes alternative approaches. The reason why this relativism is of such importance lies in the periodic change of the discursive formations (e.g. modern science) through the course of history as frames of reference, which then form a new superseding episteme.[104] Therefore most of Foucault's texts could be labelled 'historical' inquiries.

The transformability of the supposedly invariable notions of truth, logic and science can best be understood by comparing different ages with each other (e.g. the structures of Renaissance-knowledge with the standards of rationality in classical or modern times). Foucault does not try to prove that that which was once considered to be true has now become false because of scientific progress. Instead he emphasises that the term truth constantly changes its meaning. According to David Shumway, Foucault

> is attempting to understand the knowledge of the past in terms of its own epistemic context. To do otherwise is to assume, as do most histories of science, that humans have always been working on the same basic problems but have only recently started to come up with very many correct answers. (...) What is considered truth at any given time will be determined not by its simple correspondence to a reality 'out there', but by its fit into the positivities of its own day.[105]

Another essential characteristic of Foucault's historical analyses (archaeologies) is the absence of rational explanations for the replacement of one episteme by another one. A bold example for such a phase of transition is the dramatic transformation at the end of the eighteenth century which marks the collapse of the classical age and at the same time the emergence of modernity. This age of transformation is described in great detail by Foucault through a comparative analysis of scientific texts from those times, yet he offers no explanation or even speculation about the reasons that might have caused this change. To posit an explanation why the episteme of the classical period became problematic and incoherent would assume the existence of a vantage point in our contemporary episteme. It is a mistake to believe that

[104] See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxii.

through such a vantage point we are now able to uncover the folly of the past once and for all. Such an assumption has characterised the episteme of modernity and is a central target of deconstructive analysis.

The most important insight to bear in mind is thus the paradoxical character of a episteme of being contingent and at the same time inevitable. Even though the conditions of truth which are given at a certain point in time and place are not further deducible, they shape the specific discourses of that time with great inclusiveness. Although it seems paradoxical, determining the epistemic conditions (conditions of truth) becomes possible only at a time when they change. Needless to say that under such circumstances the terms used to describe the episteme in question are no longer part of it. It is obvious that Foucault is unable to take us back into the past because we can not 'forget' our specific standards of rationality. The only way to deal with this 'state of blindness' seems to be to accept it and to apply the same contingency and time limit to our present episteme. Even though there is no point of reference from where to view the current discourses in an objective and neutral manner, one must assume that sometime in the future our notion of truth including its scientific implications, will be regarded as being erroneous, incoherent and obsolete and will therefore give way to a new scientific paradigm.[106]

It is important to notice that the changes of the epistemic conditions in question are not the work of identifiable agents. Foucault frequently warns us not to hold single individuals or institutions of power (the state, science, the capital) responsible for those transformations. Instead one has to understand them as a combinatory effect of many impersonal factors which are as such accidental and without specific direction. Only as a whole they seem to have a certain directedness.[107]

As Foucault's analysis of the transition from the classical age to modernity shows, one of the most far-reaching effects of this event was that people realised, that human knowledge in general is limited because of the limits of the language that is used to acquire and represent

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[105] David R. Shumway, *Michel Foucault*, 66.

[106] At present we are in the midst of such a transformation where modernity is superseded by post-modernity. Even though one can not deny that there are changes happening in many different spheres, one has to acknowledge that it is a very slow process that takes time over a long period which is why for many it seems that there is no such thing as a 'post' of modernity.

[107] Such an emphasis on socio-cultural synergy is reminiscent of Durkheim's functionalism which became enormously influential in the social sciences during the Mid 20th century and had an impact on early French structuralism (Levi-Strauss) and some forms of post-structuralism (e.g. Baudrillard).
The invention of photography at the beginning of the nineteenth century can be understood in similar terms, viz. as the coincidence of technical, political, economical and artistic factors, which were all based in modernist notion of reality. Without these social, technological, and cultural influences the fusion of the different components of photography (optical, chemical, mechanical), which had a distinct order and direction only in its last phase, would probably not have happened.

this knowledge. During the classical period people believed to be able to completely represent the secrets of nature with the then available scientific discourses. This view is still held by the majority of scientists today. The human as subject of this knowledge was believed to be in a position of being 'the Other' of that which was studied (e.g. nature), even if it was about the nature of humans themselves. At the beginning of modernity the faith in the transparency of language and the unambiguous relationship between humans and the world gradually vanished. Once again humans became the measure of all things although this time in a much more limited sense than at the beginning of the Renaissance. Thus humans were suddenly confronted with the following paradox: Even though they only had a limited capacity to understand and represent reality, it was the knowledge of this limitation that made it possible to know (or to speculate about) the farthest point of human knowledge. Dreyfus and Rabinow point out that each new attempt at representation

> will have to claim an identity and a difference between finitude as limitation and finitude as source of all facts, between the positive and the fundamental. Seen under this double aspect man appears: (1) as a fact among other facts to be studied empirically, and yet as the transcendental condition of the possibility of all knowledge; (2) as surrounded by what he cannot get clear about (the unthought), and yet as a potentially lucid cogito, source of all intelligibility; and (3) as the product of a long history whose beginning he can never reach and yet, paradoxically, as the source of that very history.[108]

This context provides another important aspect of Foucault's notion of truth, especially in the humanities. The discoursive rules of the respective sciences are determined to a large extent by their own specific limitations. And since the sign-system (language) used to represent their knowledge is itself among the objects of inquiry, it does not make sense to label the theories produced by the human sciences as true or erroneous as such.

All of Foucault's 'historical' inquiries follow a similar approach of describing the general conditions that are responsible for the changes and transformations of the discourses in question. For example, Foucault's earliest book *Madness & Civilisation* is an 'archaeological' study of the concept of madness and the fundamental change of its meaning over the last 400 years. One of his basic premises is that the phenomenon 'madness' is not a natural and un-historical category, but instead represents an epistemological space of intersecting discourses, which altogether constitute the subject 'madness'.[109] The exposition of Foucault's *Discipline*

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[108] Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, 31.

[109] Another basic principle of Foucault's archaeologies is the attempt to understand the historical events and documents in question from the vantage point of their own episteme (to the extent that this is possible). Although

and Punish will make especially clear, that the determining factors consist of a network of power interests, which do not primarily work on the basis of open repression, but rather through the ability to make people internalise by means of socialisation the former external disciplining pressures and forces.

Summing up, we could say that the most important feature of Foucault's work is his understanding that scientific and rational standards of a given discourse are subject to ambiguous and arbitrary historical transitions. This basic principle is also a valid tool for our historical understanding of photographic production and consumption as part of an evolving cultural and political dynamics and inseparable from these broader influences. It seems important to understand that all that which is summed up under the notion of photography is not merely a technical and straightforward medium, but instead comprises a whole range of heterogeneous discourses and practices.

Foucault constantly reminds us to be suspicious of the notion of a progressively developing history and instead to search for unmotivated breaks within the epistemic conditions of the phenomena in question. In his view there are no enclosed spheres such as the politics, the economy, the state, the education, governed by individuals who are in full control over their positions and decisions.[110] This is also linked with his understanding of the power which these governmental institutions exert over the population. One could call his concept of power impersonal or de-individualised, because it is not a 'thing' or 'substance' someone can posses, but a purely relational mechanism or dynamics. Foucault: "'How', not in the sense of 'How does it manifest itself?' But 'By what means is it exercised'? And 'What happens when individuals exert (as they say) power over others?'"[111]

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it is self-evident that we are unable to forget the current standards of rationality (to get rid of our present perspective) we must at least try to avoid interpretations that are based on the notion of progress that has its peak in the present.

[110] The same is true for photography where no photographer-author exists who is in total control over the photographic process. This is partly due to the fact that photographs always belong to certain genre, schools and traditions. In opposition to traditional art-historical approaches, a Foucauldian based analysis tries to understand why certain photographs fit into pre-defined visual schemata better than others, instead of searching for the intentions of the photographer-author. In this sense the question about the 'essence' and the 'truth' of photography is less important than determining the discourses, practices and genre which are their preconditions. Together they make up the visual episteme which does not only determine the different photographic schools, genre and categories but governs the 'economy' of our visual sense in general.

[111] Foucault, "The Subject and Power." Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault.* 217.

It is noteworthy that Foucault's notion of power comprises an element of free choice (will) that differs from theories that understand power in general as suppression. For example, advertising photography which asks women to increase their photogeneity (desirability) through buying and using cosmetics is a very bold example for the way power works through the manipulation of people's behaviour. It also is a good case in point to demonstrate the importance of the element of free choice. If advertising were telling its customers that purchasing the product can not really 'fix' the problem once and for all, it would be unnecessary to buy it. As important as it is to make the product known, advertising has to maintain a specific mentality in its customers. Feelings of 'being guilty' is one of the most effective means to achieve this because it seems to be a force coming from 'within' rather than from outside. In this example, women who do not buy cosmetics could be held

3.2 Seeing and Surveillance - Knowledge and Power

Foucault's genealogies often feature a particular concern with the 'regime of seeing' that is part of an episteme, in a fashion reminiscent of the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. It is thus quite surprising that he has not written a 'genealogy of visuality', but instead produced a large number of more or less scattered statements about this subject matter.[112] Apart from discussing the medical gaze in *The birth of the clinic* it is his *Discipline and Punish* that comprises probably the most extensive description of how the visual sense became a powerful tool to colonise the body of the modern individual (the gaze of surveillance and its normalising and disciplining effects).[113]

The object of study in this text is the fundamental transformation of the juridical system that took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Instead of maltreating and torturing the body of the condemned, people were increasingly locked up and subjected to a sophisticated rehabilitation code. Gradually the institution of the modern prison came into existence. To understand this far-reaching transformation one has to ask for the reason that transformed a formerly unimportant and in-effective part of the penal system (imprisonment) into its main feature. The traditional view is that this change was the result of an enlightened and humanistic attitude, that tried to make torturing the body of the condemned look like a barbaric act. For Foucault though, this change marks the invention and institutionalisation of a universal discipline which still defines modern culture (discipline in the sense of a state-organised or corporate and all-encompassing management and control of the behaviour and consciousness of the modern individual).

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responsible for, let's say, an accelerated ageing process. The simple fact that ageing is a normal part of every human's life must be negated in order to keep up the false promises. Thus the question remains how much choice people really have? Is the possibility to choose between ten different brands of the same product a matter of free choice or is it a very effective means to disguise, that the choice between buying and not buying does not really exist?
See Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*.

[112] Jay's *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, (pp.381-416.) contains a condensed summary of Foucault's critical analysis of the meaning of visual perception in metaphysics after Descartes.

[113] In chapter 4 I am going to explore Foucault's understanding of the meaning of the visual sense in modern medicine in more detail, viz. in context of the feminist critique about the laws that force women to put their pregnant bodies on 'public display'. In general one could say that *The Birth of the Clinic* is an attempt to determine the metaphysical connotations of the medical gaze.

> Over all these endeavours on the part of clinical thought to define its methods and scientific norms hovers the great myth of a pure Gaze that would be pure Language: a speaking eye. It would scan the entire hospital field, taking in and gathering together each of the singular events that occurred within it; and as it saw, as it saw ever more and more clearly, it would be turned into speech that states and teaches. (...) This speaking eye would be the servant of things and the master of truth. (Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 114.)

The reforms of the old juridical system were a result of the increasing awareness that the populational and political changes of those times which were a demographic by-product of the rise of capitalist production in the industrial revolution (the rapid increase of population, mass-production of goods in factories, urban migration) called for new administrative techniques of the state. The rapid rise in urban populations combined with the working conditions of the poor and the high levels of unemployment set the context for an entirely new era in crime. Not only was there an increase in civil crime (arising from the deterioration in social conditions), there was also the increased threat to the middle classes of the political aspirations of those who suffered under the industrialisation. As such, there became a major need to engage in social controls that could cope with these new social and political conditions.[114]

> The standard by which justice operates was no longer the power of the sovereign and the truth of the confession but rather the 'humanity' which all parties to the social contract share. Punishment, accordingly, must be modulated, made more lenient, for it is not only the criminal who is implicated in each of his actions, but the whole of society. Hence the limit of punishment - and its target - is the humanity of each subject.[115]

This change of the penal system is more than a reform of its practices because it is based on a completely new concept of the individual. Whereas the pre-modern individual's life was almost entirely determined through its integration into the structures of the family, the state and the church (pre-modern key agents of socialisation), the modern subject was 'born' by substituting these absolute ties for a self that was founded on an individual core, enabling people to determine their own conditions of life.[116] In Foucault's analysis it is this self which becomes the target of the 'humanised' juridical system. Most important in this context is Foucault's understanding of this 'new' subject, individual, or self as a construction of the reformed penal system (together with the changes in medicine, psychiatry and the modern

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In contrast to this ocular-centric concept, Foucault seeks to demonstrate that seeing and language are fundamentally and inseparably intertwined. Thus seeing is always determined and conditioned by larger cultural and metaphysical discourses.

[114] Accordingly, the main problems were connected to the obvious legal loop-holes, yet there was another reason for the necessity to reform the juridical system, viz. the increasing non-efficiency of the traditional punishment as spectacle. Performances of the power of the monarch needed to happen in public for two reasons: Firstly, torture and death were meant to act as deterrent and warning, but it also served as a visible act of the monarch's fairness and mercy. Foucault thus emphasises that these spectacles were a delicate balancing act that could easily turn into rebellion if the juridical sense of the crowd was violated.

[115] Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, 148.

[116] The modern configuration of power and cultural production changed from the family, church and state described above to one defined by a transformed church, a transformed state and its institutions (especially the work place), and the urbanisation of the family with the associated loss of 'gemeinschaft' (loss of extended family structure and the predominance of the nuclear family).

human sciences). As a consequence the changes of the juridical system must be viewed as driven mainly by the need for more effective means to discipline and survey a fast growing population, whereas the humanitarian aspect of this process is rather a by-product.[117]

The new goal of the jurisprudence to prevent the individual from becoming delinquent (or to enforce its rehabilitation) made it necessary to acquire a whole set of new techniques and knowledge how to exercise power, which was unavailable at the time.[118] This criminological knowledge needed to be based on the scientific (sociological, psychological) understanding of the individual, especially through consideration and understanding of the personal motives that lead to the crime. Previous to the reforms, questions about motives were not part of the juridical trial as such, because the only relevant topic in order to uphold law and order was to determine the kind and severity of the crime (and the adequate punishment/revenge). Therefore one could say that the expert knowledge that is represented in psychiatric and sociological reports, the reconstruction of the offender's biography and personality profile, the likelihood of re-offending and successful rehabilitation is a product of the changes of the penal system.

It seems rather obvious that the penal system's techniques to discipline people are a universal phenomenon that also governs a number of other new or newly reformed institutions of that time which have come to be regarded as normal today. Irrespective whether it is the military, the prison, the factory, the school (university), or the hospital, each of them shows slightly altered structures of the same discipline. Thus the prison and the military represent the most extreme and pure forms of this general discipline. If we recall the fact that the subject in Foucault's understanding does not exist as such but is the result of educational and conditioning forces, one could also formulate: In the course of its process of socialisation the modern individual is the result of passing through the filters of a number of the above mentioned disciplining institutions.[119]

With the fast growing number of people the foremost problem was to organise (assemble) them in small and confined spaces, allowing authorities to instantly register every irregularity in the behaviour of each individual. Irrespective of whether people were put in barracks,

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[117] It is important to emphasise that Foucault does not deny the humanistic elements that are part of the development of the modern prison (and the asylum). Yet, what might look like an irrational and barbaric act of the totalitarian power of the monarch (from our point of view) was in fact strictly based on juridical (and religious) principles. Therefore it is not unlikely that sometime in the future our contemporary prisons and psychiatric hospitals will also be regarded as inhumane and lacking a rational basis.

[118] See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 7.

[119] The discipline of each institution is made up of the following elements: 1) structural hierarchies, 2) definitions of normality (normal behaviour, normal hereditary constitution), 3) examinations, tests, 4) total visibility of the subject's space, 5) continuous (visual) surveillance of the subject's behaviour/performance. (See Prado, *Starting with Foucault*, 60.)

factories, prisons or schools, the goal became to make the subject an ally of the disciplining forces. Once the discipline is installed it is enough to remind the individual that it is continuously under surveillance and regularly subjected to inspections. Foucault calls this new technique, that turns every individual into a small yet important cog in an increasingly complex 'machine' the modern microphysics of power. One of its main effects is a deep rift in the subject which helps to control its potentially dangerous increase in (economical) power by weakening its political capacities. Foucault thus writes: "If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination."[120]

It is important to note again that the phenomenon of state controlled socialisation described by Foucault is slow, occurring through generations, but is a major factor in social and political change both in the past and today. One of the reasons why it is slow is that it involves the reshaping of the entire edifice of the meaning and power relations of society, even to the point of changing the way people feel and perceive: visual perception being the primary concern here. In effect, the state underwent a major shift in power at the dawning of modernity, and then proceeded to install a system of cultural reproduction which reinforced this new location of power and the ideologies that legitimated it. This amounted to the emergence of a new consciousness and a new sense of existence. This kind of social change occurs throughout all agencies under the control and influence of the state and the political interests it represents. This includes the institutions of education, health, industry, workplace, mass media, sport, recreation, military, and government. In their aggregate the effects of these transformations in key socialising agencies are able to drift into domains beyond the direct reach of the ideological state apparatus, such as the family and the consciousness of individuals. The consciousness of an entire population can thereby transform according to and under the influence of a particular cultural or class genre (e.g. bourgeois), through a systematic cultural project of discipline and punishment.

3.3 The Politics of Visual Domination - Panopticism

I believe that we are now able to understand the strategic importance of the gaze of surveillance for the enforcement of the modern state's discipline, and implicitly the role of photography in this process. The primacy of the visual sense in modernity is thus not only a

[120] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 138.

metaphysical idiosyncrasy but also the product of a very real and concrete process by which a consciousness is shaped by the ideologies of the state apparatus. Conversely, the technical and aesthetic advances in photography (and its successors film, television and video) can be seen to reinforce the structures of the consciousness that invented these gadgets in the first place. We can thereby position photography as a product of a set of socialising contingencies, as well as a contributor to great socialising influence. Photography is a component of both the micro and the macro-physics of modern power. It is thereby important to focus on their interdependency instead of trying to determine a presumably natural hierarchy between these two spheres.

The technical progress in photography seems to be an autonomous process that cannot be disrupted except through questioning the notion of progress (development, advancement) as such. Therefore one has to ask: Who has a vested interest in this progress? Who will profit from the advanced technologies? Who is setting the technological agenda? Who is the driving force behind the research and development of new technical solutions? In anticipation we might say that it is the modern state apparatus that utilises the photographic gaze for its surveying techniques. Total visibility is the key term in this context. Considering Foucault's genealogical understanding of this subject matter David Levin writes:

> To be mastered, all beings, and the very being of beings, must be made constantly visible, constantly present, ready to hand. Thus the politics that is allied with the metaphysics of presence is a politics of invisible surveillance, disciplinary regimes of supervision, the totalitarian administration and authoritarian control of vision and visibility. Panopticism.[121]

The somewhat lengthy excursion of the previous section into the broader meaning of the reforms of the penal system should now clearly show its relevance for the understanding of the gaze of surveillance. We just have to shift our focus away from the disciplinary techniques as such to the actual way they are enforced. It is not surprising that again the prison is the boldest example of a structure of discipline that creates a space of total visibility. In Jeremy Bentham's famous architectural plan of the "panopticon", the thick walls of the dark and shielded dungeon (depriving the inmates from daylight and shielding them from being seen by the wardens) were replaced by an octagonal building that comprises the cells and which has a watch-tower located in its centre. Whereas the cells have windows on at least two sides for sufficient illumination, the windows of the watch-tower are darkened by tinted glass or venetian blinds that has the effect of a 'one-way' visibility. In Foucault's words the main effect

[121] David Michael Levin, "Keeping Foucault and Derrida in Sight." *Sites of vision.* Edited by Levin, 404.

of this panopticism is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action;"[122] The prisoners have to behave as if they were under constant surveillance. Every 'misbehaviour' is likely to be noticed and reprimanded. Thus by internalising the gaze of surveillance the individual (inmate) becomes the accomplice of the disciplining power that he or she is subjected to. The external signs of power, their violent and authoritative character are replaced by a well calculated and continuous economy of criss-crossing gazes which see but are invisible themselves.[123]

In conclusion we could say that panopticism too is a disciplinary technique which strengthens the effectiveness of the individual instead of crushing or hampering it. One of the preconditions for it to work properly is a detailed knowledge about the inner predispositions of the respective individuals. This is at the same time the context for the emergence of the social sciences such as psychology, sociology, criminology and anthropology. According to Foucault it is a mistake to call them objective sciences because they serve the specific purpose of reinforcing modern discipline.[124] Their emergence was not triggered by an unspecific quest for knowledge but through the necessity to find answers for problems regarding the management, medical treatment, education and juridical control of an increasing number of

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[122] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201.

[123] It is also interesting to note that Bentham was a major mover in the social reforms that facilitated the industrial revolution in England, involving the removal of social obstructions to capitalist production. In this sense we can also situate Bentham's prison reforms within the context of the reforms he was supervising in other spheres and show further how the transformation of the prison system was very closely linked with the more general transformation of industrial society to one in which surveillance and prison architecture are common outside the prison – thus extending the prison system to include the whole of society. In this way we can more fully appreciate how modernity as a system of discipline and punishment works on us all as a socialising influence even if we have never been to prison or never broken the law. Foucault remarks: "(The panopticum) is polyvalent in its applications; (...) The panoptic schema makes any apparatus of power more intense: it assures its economy (in material, in personnel, in time); it assures its efficacy by its preventive character, its continuous functioning and its automatic mechanisms." (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 205.)
I would like to briefly mention a few historic examples of the utilisation of the camera obscura and the photographic camera for surveillance purposes. Johann Caspar Lavater's 'Pysiognomische Fragmente' from 1775 are an attempt to find universal 'criminological categories' on the grounds of common *facial features* of criminals. The visual material used for this project consisted of many thousands of realistic drawings, most of them made with the help of a camera obscura. Lavater understood his enterprise as a contribution to the humanisation of the penal system because it ought to replace torture and inquisition through the ability of the judge to *see* in the face of the accused whether she or he was guilty.
Another famous example are the photographs of the Parisian Commune from 1871. For the first time in history people were sentenced to death on the grounds of evidence provided by photographic images. Needles to say that since then photographs have became a very important element of police investigations, military actions, activities of the secret services etc. (See Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema.*)

[124] Jeremy Bentham and Herbert Spencer (both contemporaries of Charles Darwin) were two key social theorists of the time. Each of them was attempting to legitimate their class position through appeals to the Newtonian episteme of Locke and the enlightenment and the emerging positivism of the day. Thus formed an important moment in the genealogy of modern sociology as (for some, i.e. structural functionalists) a discipline of social control.

people. The emphasis of the close link between discipline (power) and knowledge is one of the most important and interesting features in Foucault's genealogical works. In his view, power never exists as such and outside of a specific sphere of knowledge. And vice versa, knowledge is always situated within specific conditions of power. What is now commonly called discourse is the field where knowledge and power intersect. It is thus impossible to trace the separate origins of power and knowledge, because that would necessitate stepping outside the available discourses of a given episteme. Instead of trying to determine the supposed agents of power and the subjects of knowledge, Foucault is constantly aiming for a description of the mechanisms of power (the discipline and its techniques) and to analyse the standards of rationality that a specific field of knowledge is based on. In this sense being a subject always means to be the product of a set of prevalent discourses. Therefore if one attempts to transcend these discourses one will inevitably lose the status of a subject. Despite the fact that our lives as individuals and subjects are determined by a complex net of power relations, it would be wrong to assume that this amounts to living in a constant state of suppression. Since power is strictly a relational phenomenon, it always bears the possibility of resistance by changing some of the parameters of the prevalent discourses. An example of how this can be done is Foucault's genealogical work that insists on the arbitrariness of the episteme we live in, and thus on the 'irrationality' of the founding institutions and ruling discourses of our contemporary society.

This Is ... Mimesis or Simulation?

Instead of further elucidating Foucault's implicit critique of ocularcentrism in his genealogical work, I want to pay attention to a text that is more explicitly concerned with a 'phenomenology of the gaze' in the arts, and the ambiguities in meaning and sense which are engendered by the modernist way of seeing. What we get is an understanding of the existential product of the social transformations which influenced our very perceptions – dimensions of our selfhood which we tend to assume are not culturally constructed. Therefore it is still very difficult to imagine what it means to say that our visual perception has undergone substantial changes during the course of history, especially if it is understood in terms of a purely physical mechanism. Thus Foucault's short study on a number of oil paintings by Rene Magritte *This Is not a Pipe*, might enable us to better understand the cultural component of the sense of seeing and its important role for the assemblage of the final image in our minds. Even though we are considering the different elements that make up

visual perception, we have to be aware that they are inseparably intertwined and that every attempt to isolate them is a more or less an arbitrary and temporary construct. In traditional ocularcentrism it is assumed that the purely physical impression (the retina-image) represents the 'raw material' that is then subjected to the workings of the mind (rationality, language, consciousness). According to Foucault we have to reverse this logic and ask instead: In what way and to what extent does the mind (language, culture, rationality) a priori determine what the eye will be able to see? It is obvious that a simple factor such as the frequency of a certain visual impression constitutes an important factor for its meaning, and the same is true for the specific angle (perspective) from which something is perceived. These two points are of great relevance for a phenomenological understanding of the photographic gaze and, in a broader sense, for a theory of (post-) modern visual media in general.

I think it is very likely that Foucault has chosen to write an essay on Magritte's work because many of the images of this painter encompass a complex and often baffling exploration of the aporias, contradictions and in-congruencies between image and text (as well as non-matching visual elements of the same image). They clearly illustrate the fact that image and text never completely coincide (they are never present in someone's consciousness at the same time), thus providing Foucault with visual proof for his theoretical assumptions about the concept of representation. This certainly is the key term not only in his study on Magritte but also in a number of his genealogical works (especially in *The Order of Things*).[125]

The main question of *This Is not a Pipe* could be formulated as: How can an image represent writing, and vice versa, how can writing represent an image? Even though Magritte's paintings are a product of his fantasy, understanding their structures and dynamics will provide us with helpful tools to comprehend the relationship between photographic image and accompanying text (title, story). This is partly due to the fact that Magritte painted in a very realistic style, or rather composed his images from elements that are painted in a very realistic style. The often dazzling, clever and witty contradictions in his images result either from the in-congruencies of the visual elements or from the misrepresentation between image and title. We should keep in mind though that there are still essential differences between a realistic painting and a realistic photograph. The main point I am trying to make is to raise the awareness of the problematic nature of the term representation.

For a large part Foucault's study is dedicated to Magritte's famous painting *The Treachery of Images* and its Variation *Les Deux Mystères*. I think it might be best to begin the exposé of

[125] In another, earlier study (*Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussell*) Foucault was trying to explore the representative character of language itself, viz. through the analysis of Roussell's project to reject and abolish the communicative, representational and signifying functions of literary language.

Foucault's text by naively asking what we see on these images? Well, it is obviously a pipe, a very real and common pipe, and underneath that element of the image one can read the carefully crafted sentence 'This is not a pipe'. The later painting shows some differences, although the general theme remains the same. The pipe and the sentence 'This is not a pipe' are displayed on a black board that stands on an easel in what looks like a classroom or painter's studio. On the upper left side another pipe is floating in the air. It has the same shape as the one on the board although it is much bigger in size.

It seems very likely that Magritte's intention was to first baffle the viewer through the contradiction between the (literal) meaning of the image and the meaning of the short text. Although the nature of the apparent contradiction is less definite than it might seem at first. If we consider the different possibilities of how text and image can refer to each other, we might even have to ask whether it is a contradiction at all, since "contradiction could exist only between two statements, or within one and the same statement. Here there is clearly but one, and it cannot be contradictory because the subject of the proposition is a simple demonstrative."[126] Who would really believe that the accumulation of colours and lines which we call an image are a pipe and not just the picture of a pipe? And yet, in case something is represented in such a realistic, detailed and unambiguous way, do we not have the habit to say that it is a pipe instead of a sign (symbol) referring to a pipe?[127] The contradiction is mainly a result of our habit (convention) to immediately relate text and image to each other, presupposing that they are naturally linked. The ambiguity of the link between the two elements of the picture is engendered through the impossibility of deciding whether the 'statement' of the image or that of the text is true.

Magritte constructed his painting in a way that enables us to either see the pipe (the image of a pipe) or to read the sentence ('This is not a pipe'), but it is not possible to comprehend both their meaning at the same time without being caught in the contradiction. Foucault thus calls this ensemble of image and text a deconstructed calligramm.[128] A calligramm is the playful performance of the age old paradox that every alphabetised culture or civilisation has to deal with, i.e. "to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read."[129]

Magritte's painting clearly displays the main characteristic of a calligramm, which means to force the viewer to alternate between image and word, although in a different way insofar as

[126] Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 19.
[127] This is the case with signs of the index form in general.
[128] Magritte's painting *The Treachery of Images* differs from a normal calligramm in the way that the image is not made up by the words 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'.
[129] Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 21.

the image of a calligramm and the words it consists of mean (express, represent) the same content or signified. Thus perceiving the pipe as a pipe one has to avoid relating the sentence to the image, which is to perceive it as an explanation or interpretation. Foucault therefore suggests that we understand the words of the sentence 'This is not a pipe' not as linguistic signs but instead as images of linguistic signs, painted by someone who does not speak French. In this case the sequence of signs 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' would become part of the image instead of representing its title.

In order to further understand the unusual and contradictory connection between image and text in Magritte's painting one has to ask whether a 'pure' visual perception of an image that is not determined by linguistic elements, is possible at all? How can one visually discern the pipe as pipe without distinguishing its peculiar shape, colour and spatial position from all other 'objects' that do not have the shape etc. of a pipe? It is obvious that this process as such is not a visual phenomenon but comprises linguistic elements as well. Magritte must have been aware of this, because he utilised this condition to create an apparently contradictory statement which is in fact logically correct if one understands it as an expression of the ontological difference between an image of a pipe and a real pipe. Usually a painting of such realistic style does not need any further explanation (title, interpretation) of what it depicts. In this case though the painter intentionally added a text that looks like a simple description but surprises the viewer because of its in-congruency with the 'literal' meaning of the image.

The ambiguousness of Magritte's painting though implicates many more ways of referring elements of the text to elements of the image. For example the demonstrative 'This' (Ceci) could also relate to the other elements of the painting, thus meaning the sentence as such: This [This is not a pipe] is not a pipe. (In general this means, that a sentence never is what it means or signifies; therefore the positive expression [This is a pipe] is not a pipe either. Another possible sense of the 'This' could be that it refers to the whole composition of image and text: This [the image of the pipe and the sentence 'This is not a pipe'] is not a pipe either. There are still other possible references for the 'This', i.e. all the other elements of the image that are not a pipe: the background, the easel or the floorboards. All these things are not pipes, which means that in this case the sentence 'This is not a pipe' would again represent a true (positive) fact. Linking the demonstrative 'This' with those objects of the image which are not representing a pipe might seem strange and forced only for as long as one is unaware of the artificiality of the conventions that govern our visual perception. Within the epistemic condition that Derrida has called ocularcentric, one of the dominant principles is to locate the meaning of an image (or in general of a visual impression) at its centre, in the literal and

figural sense. The centre of an image is accordingly that which first 'grabs' one's eyes, which fills most of the space or creates the strongest contrast, which has got an easily recognisable shape etc. It also means the centre in a literal sense: the intersection of the two diagonals.[130] This concept clearly show the signs of the modern fetish to find the true statement or the true meaning of the image-text ensemble, whereas the fact that it is necessary to acknowledge an endless variety of meanings is part of the postmodern turn. A phenomenology of ocularcentrism also shows that the presumably natural connection between image and text is an expression of the desire to have the meaning of the depicted object linguistically affirmed. One could formulate that Magritte's art is a play with the small space between image and text that constitutes meaning of an image.

> It is there, on these few millimetres of white, the calm sand of the page, that are established all the relations of designation, nomination, description, classification. The calligramm absorbed that interstice; but once opened, it does not restore it. The trap shattered on emptiness: image and text fall each to its own side, of their own weight. No longer do they have a common ground nor a place where they can meet, where words are capable of taking shape and images of entering into lexical order.[131]

There is another painting by Magritte that can help us understand the ambiguousness of the concept of visual and linguistic representation. In the foreground of a painting with the title *Représentation* one can see a stone wall and in the background park-like grounds where people play a ball game. A balustrade rises on the left side of the wall creating a 'frame' for another version of exactly the same image, although in a smaller scale: The wall, the lawn, the players and in the background the trees. At first the picture seems comprehensible in a straightforward manner, because the title affirms what is so obviously depicted, i.e. one view represents the other. Although, the problematic (ambiguous) nature of the image becomes clear as soon as one asks, which one represents the other and which one is the represented? Or in other words: which one is the original and which one the copy? Magritte created this confusion by withholding from the viewer a scale or measurement in order to prevent a hierarchy between the two images (views). Consequently the title "Représentation" loses its affirmative character. It is no longer self-evident, whether it is actually the title of the painting or whether it explains the meaning of it. Instead "Représentation" can be understood as a

[130] It is one of the main aims of postmodern art photography to acknowledge the importance of the elements of an image that are out of focus, that have no definite shape, which are located at the periphery of the frame etc. See the works of the photographers discussed in chapter 7.
[131] Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 28.

reversed construction of "This Is not a Pipe". Whereas the sentence 'This is not a pipe' negates a condition that is so clearly depicted by the image, the title "Représentation" describes a situation that only appears to be a representation but is in fact a simulation. For Foucault the difference between the two ways of reproduction can also be explained in terms of the difference between resemblance and similitude. Resemblance always presupposes the existence of an original within a natural hierarchy, whereas similitude is not hierarchically structured but as a series. Therefore similitude has no definite beginning (origin) and no end but instead appears as an infinite circular movement. "Similitude circulates the simulacrum as an infinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar."[132] Magritte's painting show elements of similitude not only in the relation between different parts of the image (the pipe on the board and the one floating in the air, the two ball-game scenes) but also between image and text.

In conclusion one could formulate that Magritte's art is a critique of the strict differentiation between linguistic signs and 'visual signs' which is oblivious to their interdependency. Furthermore it is a reminder of the arbitrariness of the convention that a text which has a direct spatial relation to an image automatically functions as its explanation, interpretation or affirmation. Thus his art resides in the sphere of simulation, non-affirmative statements, ambiguous spatial relations and non-definite scales. The works of contemporary art-photographers, some of which we are going to discuss in chapter seven, feature very similar artistic approaches and aesthetical attitudes, even though photography differs in many ways from painting. There are similar issues to clarify, such as the relation between a photograph and the depicted (represented) object (thing), as well as the relation between a photograph and accompanying text. Magritte too will appear again in Duane Michals' famous photographs which he took when he visited Magritte at his home in Brussels in the mid-sixties.

[132] Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 44.

Part II

Chapter 4

Feminist Critique versus Philosophical Tradition: A Decentralised Project

Compared with the chapter on deconstruction, the following analysis of feminist texts seems to require an even more serious and conscious self-reflection about one's own position as 'author'. Thus an important question is how to adequately reflect on a theory (discourse) which was established as the voice of a counter-movement standing for the position of the Other? Thus, in regard to my personal situation as a member of the male sex and representative of patriarchy it seems questionable whether it makes sense for me to talk about women's 'liberation' which aims at the overthrow of patriarchal domination? From a more epistemological perspective one could further ask: Is the language put to my disposal by dominantly male philosophers and other theoreticians of consciousness useful to formulate an understanding of the radical different position of women? Even if it would generally be possible for men to take up a feminist perspective, is not distrust the first reaction one would naturally expect to evoke, because what is intended to be a message (sign) of solidarity might well be interpreted as yet another symbolic attempt to maintain one's discoursive dominance?
Because of these difficulties the following discussion of feminist texts shows signs of a number of ambivalent attitudes. On the one hand I was fascinated by the unconventional and sometimes subtle, sometimes radical and aggressive critique of the dominant social-political powers, and on the other hand I often felt that I had to distance myself from those texts which hold the fact of 'being a man' per se (in the biological sense of belonging to the male sex) responsible for the domination and discrimination of women in many spheres of society. This is true especially for the founders of the anti-pornography movement in the early eighties Andrea Dworkin and Catharine McKinnon. Their critique of the patriarchal social order is based on essentialist presumptions which lead them to a concept of enmity between a good, reproductive and peaceful femininity and a generally evil, aggressive and destructive maleness.
I am going to discuss Dworkin's and McKinnon's view in more detail in the next chapter which is dedicated to the way women are represented in pornographic images. For the moment though, it seems sufficient to mention that a large part of the heterogeneous feminist

movement seeks to avoid or deconstruct any kind of essentialism, thus viewing the anti-porn movement of the Dworkin-style quite critically and with mixed feelings. This is not the case because these feminists support pornography and its inherent moments of sexism, racism, exploitation, misogyny etc., but because essentialist arguments tend to result in strict separatism from everything that is male, thereby failing to overcome the power structures that create violence and domination. Furthermore, feminists who are pleading for a ban of pornography (because they see it as a violation of a supposedly genuine feminine sexuality) can sometimes unwittingly support a specific faction of Christian-conservative politics which has been responsible for the confinement of women to house and kitchen for many centuries.

The notion of essentialism already signals one of the central themes of the feminist critique.[133] In general, essentialist thinking assumes that an a priori difference exists between nature and culture, between natural (genetically determined) human characteristics (behaviour, attitudes) and those which are culturally acquired (e.g. through education). This is a good example of the tendency in modern western thinking to base the norms and principles that govern political and social life on apparently 'natural' preconditions. Yet, the fact that contemporary feminist theory does not only criticise institutionalised patriarchal essentialism but also essentialist positions within the broader feminist spectrum helps men, as well as marginalised and underprivileged groups of women to participate in this project. For some feminists this second point led to the disillusioning and painful (yet liberating) insight that it is impossible to create a theory or a political program that includes all women and their specific needs (political demands, hopes etc.). Therefore large parts of feminist debates are concerned with the many-layered and ambiguous meanings of terms such as 'the woman', 'femininity', 'feminine sexuality', 'motherhood', 'feminine desire', (feminine) 'homosexuality', 'women's self-determination', 'women's equality' etc. All these concepts are context-dependent and change their meanings according to differences in class and race, age, sexual orientation, education, economic situation etc.

Another central theme in contemporary feminist discussions is the problem of how (with what language) to describe what it means to be 'a women', and to develop an adequate political programme. The main question remains whether it is possible to represent femininity in a language that for millennia has been shaped by patriarchal discourses, in the course of which they appropriated a large number of sexisms into their vocabulary (consciousness). For a long time the philosophical tradition used the concept of femininity as principle of the Other. It either played an inferior and complementary role, or it merely marked a position of 'non-

existence'. Our aim therefore should be to discuss these central problems in the current chapter with special consideration of the differences among contemporary feminists. This also includes the feminist appropriation and critique of the post-structuralist theory reviewed in the previous chapters. Feminism is well aware of the sexist flaws in these texts, although it also sees their far-reaching critical potential which is useful for the development of a 'feminine writing'.

The main aim of this chapter is to provide a broader feminist background for the following analysis of pornographic discourses, especially in the visual media. It is probably noteworthy that pornography also plays an important role in contemporary art-photography. One of the effects of the feminist emancipation is the increasing number of women photographers. It is therefore not surprising that many more photographs are taken from a 'female perspective', being concerned with a whole array of feminist themes without regard for traditional photographic aesthetics. One could formulate that the drive behind feminist theories (philosophies, texts) to search for or create a genuine female voice or language in order to represent the (political) rights and demands of women has its analogy in feminist-photography in the production of an independent and self-determined 'image'.

The under-representation of women in public and political life is a problem with deeper effects than the common perception of it in terms of a mathematical dis-proportionality. For a long time it seemed to be one of the most important feminist goals to heighten the awareness of this particular kind of inequality. It is a phenomenon which is now widely known as 'quota-woman' and 'equal rights and opportunities'. Equality was defined under the assumption that there is a neutral position which denies both sexes any a priori advantages. In philosophy this (sex-) neutral position is called rationality (ratio, logic) and in politics the (autonomous) subject of the modern state, which is founded through a contract of its members. However, feminists have come to understand that an unspecific claim for equality does not necessarily result in more freedom, but often requires the (unconscious) adoption of an order that is fundamentally based on the suppression of women. This might be one way to understand Simone de Beauvoir who was one of the first feminists who emphasised the necessity to differentiate between the terms sex and gender, even though she still believed that women's ability to have children proposes an objective (natural) obstacle to the achievement of individual goals. Moira Gatens writes: "De Beauvoir, in a fashion reminiscent of the writings of J.S. Mill and Taylor, concludes that in order to achieve authenticity, woman must overcome or transcend her biology and her role in natural life. By this means, she enters the

[133] For a critical evaluation of the anti-essentialist position see Teresa de Lauretis, "Upping the Anti (sic) in

culture which has excluded her as a creator of values."[134] For Gatens the assessment of the sexes' biological characteristics and abilities as either advantageous or disadvantageous in regard to the demands and requirements of a society, can not be understood in terms of a cultural a priori but instead as an arbitrary construction. For example, bourgeois conservatism could maintain its patriarchal dominance only through continuous reference to the 'natural weakness' of women.[135] One way of criticising this view is to demonstrate that, to a large extent the presumably natural characteristics (abilities) of women are culturally determined. Furthermore it is important to show that some of women's specific characteristics are disadvantageous only in regard to a specific frame of reference (e.g. patriarchal, bourgeois, capitalist society). Thus, for Gatens the basic texts of Hobbes and Rousseau, which are still influential on the current structures of society, are bold examples for the fact that the supposedly democratic 'contract sociale' necessitates the exclusion of a large number of individuals from participation in political life. Her analysis of those texts pays special attention to the body-image that serves Hobbes as metaphor for the state (Leviathan). Throughout Hobbes' text it is overtly obvious that the metaphors and comparisons he employs all refer to a male body. The responsibility of a feminist critique thus is to expose the (epistemic) conditions that lead to this biased situation. Hobbes' metaphorical body is a construction which does not represent women in the political sphere, because it denies them their own voice and, needless to say, it is also oblivious to this constitutional in-equality.[136] During the last centuries the formal restrictions regarding political rights to speech have changed drastically in favour of women (and other previously discriminated groups), but the metaphorical body-image of the modern state apparatus is still shaped by the language of the Leviathan. Gatens writes:

> The effects of this image show its contemporary influence in our social and political behaviour which continues to implicitly accord privilege to particular bodies and their concerns as they are reflected in our ways of speaking and in what we speak about. It refuses to admit anyone who is not capable of miming

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Feminist Theory." *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Edited by Simon During. 74-89.

[134] Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy*, 54. See also Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 68.
It is obvious that to some extent, De Beauvoir's feminist existentialism unwittingly supports a number of sexist positions, such as the belief that in economical terms, women represent a threat or risk because of their child-rearing ability. If the 'production' of children would be measured in the same terms as the production of consumer goods, Western capitalist ideology needed to completely reassess its basic ideas of growth and profit margin.

[135] See Kenneth Clatterbaugh, *Masculinity. Contemporary Perspectives on Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society*, 15-36.

[136] Even if women tried to be heard their statements were often not taken seriously because it was an easy task to defame them as hysterics, men-haters, witches, whores, etc. or (as is the case today) listen only if they speak with a masculine tongue. (See Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 24.)

> its reason and its ethics, in its voice. Its political language has no vocabulary and no space for the articulation of certain questions. Our political body continues to assume that its active members are free from the tasks of reproduction, free from domestic work, free from any desires other than those 'whispered' to it by one of its Hobbesian 'counsellors' (...).[137]

Because of its inherent bias the modern state in the Hobbesian tradition is a good example for the difficulties to overcome the misrepresentation of women. The call for equality on the grounds of an unequal frame of reference can only result in the continuation of the in-equality through the construction and legitimisation of norms and values imposed upon the whole of society that happen to be the norms and values of a particular class of men. This has been referred to as discrimination through system-immanent, 'natural' limitations by (post-) feminists of the late eighties and early nineties who are aware of the need to understand the many apparently unchangeable parameters of social life as symptoms of patriarchal domination. As long as women are not able to extend their influence onto the constitutive foundations of political and social life (in accordance with their self-defined abilities and limitations) it is impossible to create a political body which represents both sexes in the same way.[138] Yet the question remains, in which language and what forum women might be able to build the awareness of their specific abilities and legitimate responsibilities and 'translate' them into adequate political claims. Gatens criticises the assumption (common for feminism of the early seventies) that there is a feminine essence which survived patriarchal dominance and that needs now to be unleashed. In a Foucauldian manner she emphasises that important concepts such as 'woman', 'body', 'desire' etc. are not unhistorical universals but products of the prevalent political (philosophical) discourses and state-administrative techniques (discipline). This is yet another example for the 'fabrication' of subjects whose self-perception can not transcend their own constitution because they have been given a set of eyes to see themselves with. I believe that this is not only an ideological problem but also a matter of lived corporeality which strongly affects everyday life of all women (and men). For example, instead of assuming that women are predestined to carry out the education of children (and to look after sick and old people) because of their greater natural or biological ability to care for others, one could reformulate this traditional view in the following way: Western capitalist societies can only function under the premise that an inherently underprivileged social group

[137] Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 25.

[138] Politics as the 'representation' of interests is itself caught up in the entire edifice of representation as such, particularly in its claim to represent social realities in some form of truth-correspondence. Our conception of politics, therefore is a simulation as opposed to direct participation.

(women) does certain jobs (which are defined as being non-productive) for free or for very little wages.

4.1 Differences instead of Equality

The general dilemma that feminists face is that it seems senseless to ask for equal rights in a society that is founded on biased political principles.[139] For many feminists one way of approaching this problem is to specifically focus on the differences between the sexes and create a catalogue of claims for more self-determinacy. The problem though is that the apparently neutral (objective) term 'difference' bears a number of heterogeneous meanings, some of which patriarchy has made use of to maintain its dominance over women. Therefore one has to ask: Who defines these differences and thereby strongly influences their ethical, economical and political effects? In general one could formulate that there are two antagonistic feminist strands which utilise the concept 'difference' to bolster their respective political programmes, i.e. the previously mentioned 'feminist-essentialism' and the so called 'difference-feminism', which is strongly influenced by post-structuralist and deconstructive theory.

Jana Sawicki describes the latter feminism in the following way:

> Indeed, in a politics of difference, difference can be a resource insofar as it enables us to multiply the sources of resistance to particular forms of domination and to discover distortions in our understanding of each other and the world. (...) The motivation for a politics of difference is the desire to avoid dogmatic adherence to categories and assumptions as well as the elision of differences to which such dogmatism can lead."[140]

The appropriation of Foucault's thinking by the diverse feminist strands is not unambiguous. Sandra Bartky, for example, accuses him of 'androcentrism',[141] which is visible through the fact that Foucault's analyses are always based on a neutral concept of power, even though most of the positions of power in society are still held by men.

In her article 'Our costs and their benefits' (which objects a proposed change of the law that defines the juridical status of rape), Monique Plaza formulates a similar critique. She argues that, since Foucault is pleading to punish rape not differently than a normal civil law case, he

[139] See Luce Irigaray, "Equal or Different." *The Irigaray Reader*. Edited by Margaret Whitford. 30-33.
[140] Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault. Feminism, Power, and the Body*. 28-9.
[141] Sandra Bartky, *Foucault, Femininity and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power*.

automatically enters into a tacit agreement with all men who view rape as a legitimate behaviour (to take possession of something that they are 'naturally' entitled to). Because of his attempt to minimise the direct juridical access to, and control over, the field of sexuality Foucault is compelled to argue from an abstract and idealist position that strangely contrasts with his usual concrete style. Plaza's accusations though are obviously based on untenable essentialist presumptions and prejudices, intermingled with heated anger. She writes: "From the position of potential rapist, to which your status as a man 'constrains' you, you can only hide the web of oppressive power that women are subject to. You can only defend the rights of rapists."[142] Instead of taking Plaza's indictment at face value it should be understood as an example of the search for concrete political effectiveness and change that is aware of its dependency on irrefutable alliances and unambiguous (slogan-like) programmes. In this case which is about criminal justice and women's self-determination, the feminist critique could easily single out an obvious target. In Plaza's words: "Rape is an important battle cry for feminists, who have proclaimed that 'every man is a potential rapist'."[143]

Foucault's concept of decentralised mechanisms of power and his understanding of the modern subject as constructed by the prevailing discourses, represent strong arguments against the essentialist belief that the behaviour of a person is mostly determined by his or her biological sex. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* was especially influential for the feminist differentiation between the biological sex and the culturally acquired sex-specific behaviour, called gender. In her influential text *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that not only a person's gender is culturally determined (manufactured) but also his or her (biological) sex, irrespective whether someone is in fact heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or transsexual. Instead of turning the bodies of women and men into an ontological basis for sexual difference, Butler attempts to show that the apparently incontestable biological fact 'body' is already shaped by a whole set of discourses. The anatomical body is always already a represented body which can not function as a neutral a priori.[144] It is therefore a mistake to situate the body in opposition to its historical and cultural environment.

Understanding the body in this way allows us to view the connection between patriarchal power, its mechanisms and techniques and the difference between the sexes not only from an ideological point of view, but also as a directly lived and experienced body-practice. (This is

[142] Monique Plaza, "Our Costs and Their Benefits." *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism.* Edited by Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins. 183.
[143] Monique Plaza, "Our Costs and Their Benefits." *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism.* Edited by Leonard and Adkins. 179.
[144] See Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 70.

also an important element of the feminist critique of the way psychoanalysis perceives the development of the sexuality of children.)

In my view Plaza's provocative statement that all members of the male sex are potential rapists, can be interpreted biologically and culturally. The main question seems to be whether the stereotypical and often cliché-like characteristic of the male sex (aggressiveness, physical strength, sex-driven etc.) are sufficient explanations for the fact, that rape and other sexual abuse is such a common crime? In Foucauldian manner one could rather formulate that sexual (ab-) use of women represents a quasi-sanctioned 'technique' (acquired through socialisation) that serves men to secure their dominance over the 'weak sex'. In the 1970s and early 1980s feminists tended to favour the biologist explanation, whereas nowadays there is a far greater understanding of sexual violence as a culturally acquired and gender specific behaviour. Feminist politics that tries to reduce the system-immanent sexual dominance and violence of men is especially concentrating on spheres where it is legitimated (or at least tolerated) by the law. One significant example for this is the only recent acknowledgement of rape in marriage as a criminal offence. Another important target of feminist critique is the very common juridical custom to often treat rape-cases in favour of the rapist since women's 'no' (there declaration of non-consent) 'really' means an unconscious 'yes'.

In the eyes of radical feminists though, it is of no importance whether the high frequency of sexual abuse of women is caused by men's biological constitution, or whether the laws represent too little a deterrent for rapists because of their relative ineffectiveness. In the end the threat that men represent is the same.[145]

4.2 The Emergence of a New Subject

I would now like to consider another central issue of feminist debates that is strongly influenced by Foucauldian genealogy. The dispute regarding women's rights for a self-determined abortion is a prime example for the creation of a new subject through the medical interventions of the state. This example also shows how humanistically inspired medical progress can become a more efficient tool for the state to control its population. The important

[145] We are going to discuss this topic in more detail in the next chapter, where it should become clear that the provocative indictment that all men are potential rapists is impossible to maintain, and also that this kind of essentialism is a problematic and unfavourable basis for realistic feminist political claims. Such generalisations not only limit men's behaviour to a very narrow scale, they also stop women developing a self-determined life that is marked by differences and non-conformity. For radical feminists, all women who engage in and enjoy heterosexual sex, suffer from a 'false consciousness' that makes them into allies with the enemy 'man'. (For an elaborate critique of this position see Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* and *Fire with Fire*).

reason though, for the rather detailed discussion of the birth of the new subject foetus, is the fact that it provides us with a very clear example of the important role of the visual sense in modern medicine and the use it makes of scientific photography.[146]

Barbara Duden who calls herself an 'historian of the body', addressed the problem of abortion not primarily from a political or ethical perspective but through a historical approach in the form of a socio-genesis of the foetus. The historical change of the (bodily) self-perception of pregnant women is one of the most important and significant themes in this socio-genesis. It is thereby crucial to notice that until the beginning of the nineteenth century the foetus as such did not exist. Despite the growing anatomical knowledge of the inside of women's bodies (especially the uterus), it was still perceived through ideas that were derived from the middle ages. Old anatomical drawings and prints always show the child inside the womb as fully developed (e.g. as a little cherub). The embryonic stages were unknown at a time when the anatomical and physiological knowledge about the human body was already much further developed. Duden sees a possible reasons for this strange delay in the fact that the 'fruit of the womb' was traditionally understood to be invisible and therefore belonged to the same realm as angels, ghosts, dead people, saints etc.[147] For a long time this quasi-religious respect for the unborn child prevented the inside of women's bodies from being subjected to the dissecting medical gaze and its mapping and transformation into analytical knowledge and truths.[148] The inner body-perception of the pregnant woman was the only 'access' to the child. Only the mother knew whether she was pregnant and how that pregnancy proceeded. Until the birth or miscarriage nobody was able to predict whether the child would be alive and healthy or deformed or dead.

At this point another important concept becomes part of the abortion debate, viz. the term life as such. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, it was the mother's perception of the first movement of the child which was the crucial sign for its enlivenment. Consequently this was also the beginning of the existence of the new subject in the juridical sense, whose life was protected by law (which means that an abortion before the first movement was legal). Yet, this practice changed by the middle of the last century. From then on the crucial moment of the child's enlivenment gradually shifted closer and closer to the act of fertilisation. Nowadays it

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[146] During the following paragraphs the reader should always keep in mind Foucault's characterisation of the medical gaze, which is a pure gaze whose truth can immediately be translated into a pure language, "a speaking eye. (...) The truth (...) would outline under its gaze, would by this same gaze and in the same order, be reserved, in the form of teaching, to those who do not know and have not yet seen. This speaking eye would be the servant of things and the master of truth." (Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 114-15. See also Duden, *The Women beneath the Skin*.)

[147] See Duden, *Der Frauenleib als Öffentlicher Ort*, 21.

is assumed to be the moment when sperm and ovum fuse.[149] For Duden this change does not only represent a progress of medical knowledge but also the expansion of (patriarchal) state organised managerial techniques.

> Her [the women's] body becomes a place, where something is happening that has immediate effects on the state, the health of the population, the 'body' of the population and the church and the husband. Like in a convex mirror one can view this new and paradox socialisation of 'woman' in the history of the first movement of the child: The perception becomes a private experience and the scientific fact of the nidation of the fertilised ovum adopts its former social function.[150]

For this process to happen it was of great importance that the different stages from the fertilisation of the ovum through to the fully developed embryo could be made visible. X-ray, ultra-sound, foetuscopy and electron microscopy helped to turn the whole pregnancy into an observable event, supervised by medical scientists who believe to know what life really is. The 'images' of electron microscopy clearly show that the supposed illustration of a biological process (the mitosis of the fertilised ovum and its nidation in the Uterus) is in fact a 'sensory nothing'. Duden concludes: "In a scale that no light ray can 'illuminate', bundles of electrons register intensities, and magnetic fields are measured whose digital formation on a screen represents 'surfaces which are impossible to be resolved by light, and thus can never be seen"[151]. And yet, legions of politicians, medical doctors, bishops, jurists and philosophers appeal to this absolutely in-sensorial fact when they talk about the state's duty to protect the unborn life. That they encounter a well prepared and credulous public is partly due to the role of the media and the education system which willingly helps to create the consciousness of an accepting public and anticipates the fabrication of a brand new subject. Photographs of the pinkish-blue foetus with an over-dimensional head and closed eyes which floats in its amniosack, have got a similar power to shape our world-view as the photographs of the blue planet earth which were taken during the first space programmes.[152] The production of this

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[148] This sacred respect was still at work after anatomists had gathered vast numbers of anatomical material of the various embryonic stages which they classified as deformed children.

[149] It is interesting to note that the current placement of the hyphen between life and non-life for the unborn child assumes that such a correct placement was always destined to happen once modernity gained sufficient scientific maturity to find the truth of the matter. This reminds us of the work of Foucault as mentioned in an earlier chapter concerning the historicism of modern knowledge. An alternative reading of the historical shift in this definition can show that the truth is found in each generation but it is never the same. Furthermore, the whole question of the placement of the division between life and non-life is addressed in the deconstruction of Derrida who reminds us that all signs have a shadow and that the line that divides them is neither natural nor permanent.

[150] Duden, *Der Frauenleib als Öffentlicher Ort*, 120 [My translation].

[151] Duden, *Der Frauenleib als Öffentlicher Ort*, 28 [My translation].

[152] The first photographs showing the foetus in its intrauterine condition appeared in 1965 in *Life-Magazine*.

new (legal) subject 'foetus' or (unborn) life is also an example of the visualisation of our post-modern environment. What used to be a sensuous (tactile) experience of a special condition of the body became an instrumentally mediated visual perception. In Baudrillardian terms one could call the images of the electron microscope simulacra because they are copies without originals.[153] It is important to emphasise that the feminist critique is concerned about the shift of women's self-perception from the sphere of 'tactual sensations' to the visual, because it means the partial loss of control over their own bodies. It is thus interesting to note that women's and midwifes' natural right to carry out abortions (before the 'first movement') was negated and replaced by a law that allowed only medical practitioners (who happen to be mostly male) to terminate pregnancies on the basis of a catalogue of medical, social and ethical criteria.[154] This so called indication-catalogue developed into an increasingly complex set of institutionalised interventions, so that nowadays a pregnancy requires women to undergo a number of advisory talks, prenatal medical check ups, statistical registrations etc. All of these require access to the bodies of women in spheres that previously belonged to their privacy. The female body becomes 'public property' and a place from which 'woman' is more and more alienated. The status of a 'cluster of cells' (and later of the foetus) as legal subject transforms the uterus of a woman into "the systemic environment for an immune-system which starts lodging there."[155]

Jana Sawicki approached this theme under the header 'new reproductive technologies'. She attempts to demonstrate that the various methods of test-tube fertilisation (in-vitro fertilisation, embryo-exchange) do not only represent another way of patriarchal and governmental control (and suppression) of women as suggested by some radical feminists, because they also bear real advantages and help for the health of women and their children. Despite her substantial critique Barbara Duden also insists on the futility to yearn for the 'good old times'. The paradox presented here is yet another example of the techniques of discipline of the modern state (Foucault calls them 'bio-power') which relies on the individual to become an ally of the medical discourse through more or less subtle infiltration and indoctrination.

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[153] For the changed anthropological meaning of visuality in modernity see Thomas Kleinspehn, *Der Flüchtige Blick*; Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*; Paul Virilio: *Die Sehmaschine*; Christoph Wulf and Dietmar Kamper (eds.), *Vom Schwinden der Sinne*; Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (eds.), *Vision In Context*; Ralf Konersmann, *Kritik des Sehens*; David Michael Levin (ed.), *Sites of Vision*; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*; Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*.

[154] Duden writes: "Wherever civil servants were assigned decision-making power over pre-natal legal matters, it became a crime for women what was the medical doctor's application of his professional competence within the frame of his duty". (Duden, *Der Frauenleib als Öffentlicher Ort*, 78.) [My translation]

[155] Duden, *Der Frauenleib als Öffentlicher Ort*, 60. [My translation]

The dys-topical concepts of fundamentalist feminists are often based on essentialist and psychological arguments which are incompatible with Foucault's concept of power.[156] Assessing the new reproductive technologies they too assume a natural opposition between a life-destroying, instrumentalist and rational maleness and a life-giving, nature-loving, emotional and peaceful femininity. The psychologist argument assumes that the main motive for developing the technologies in question is a male envy of women's childbearing ability. In the (horror-) scenarios of some authors this process will inevitably result in a 'gynocide' and the production of artificial bearing-machines, or in social equivalents as with Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaiden's tale.* Sawicki views this scenario in a critical way because it works with the 'repressive model' of power. Instead of repeating traditional dichotomies (such as a good femininity/destructive maleness - penis envy/childbearing envy) she proposes to develop a politics of differences that allows men to work on (critical) feminist projects too.
A second important implication of that 'difference-feminism' is the realisation and acceptance of the fact that there is no united 'women's front' whose members have exactly the same ideals and beliefs, political visions, sexual preferences etc.; Sawicki: "We can build political unties not on the basis of some naturalised identity as woman, or mothers, but on the basis of common political opposition and affinities with other political struggles. (...) We must build alliances across race, class, sexual differences and differences in ability."[157] I believe that this is another example of some of the pressing difficulties that feminists have to deal with because of a 'lack' of their own language and identity. On what grounds could it be possible to formulate common political goals since the differences between women of different cultures, classes, sexual preferences etc. need to be represented and expressed in different terms or languages? Instead of finding or developing the one universal language (medium) it seems necessary to let go of this utopian ideal and come back to the outdated feminist slogans 'women's liberation' and 'equality for women'.

4.3 Feminism on the Search for (Sexual) Identity

I would now like to discuss two other important issues where feminists attempt to establish their own identity through dissociating themselves from traditionally male dominated

[156] Sawicki refers – inter alia - to the following texts: Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine*; Corea, *Man-made Woman: How the New Reproductive Technologies Affect Women*; Patricia Spallone and Deborah Lynn Steinberg (eds.), *Made to Order: The Myth of Reproductive and Genetic Progress.*
[157] J. Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault*, 92.

discourses.[158] One of these feminisms is particularly concerned with the critical discussion (appropriation) of deconstructive methods, whereas another one emphasises the need for a critique and women-specific adaptation of psychoanalytical theory. My main aim here is to show how feminists try to solve some of the inherent methodological difficulties of their projects without producing the same aporias as the texts they criticise.

In general, one could say that deconstructive feminism (feminist deconstruction) analyses philosophy's basic ideas and concepts by paying special attention to their gender-specific meanings. Instead of constructing corresponding terms with a 'female' bias, the real goal is to destabilise the strictly dualistic relation between these opposites because the same logic is responsible for establishing unequal power relations between men and women that also marginalises and discriminates fringe groups within the different feminist strands. Diane Elam remarks on this issue.

> The problem with thematic criticism is that notions of 'women's issues', 'women's interests', and so on cannot help but imply that there is an identity to 'woman', which would legitimate the determination of what the correct interests, attitudes, and concerns of any particular woman or of all women are. What this boils down to is a problem that feminism, especially in her academic gown, shares with deconstruction: the main concern becomes a question of: who's a good feminist and who's a bad daughter? (...) That is to say, in the strongest version of this theoretical pitfall, feminism takes on the power structure in which hierarchical mothers make certain that their daughters remain dutiful in the name of feminism, or more precisely in the name of *the* theory of feminism.[159]

Therefore Elam suggests keeping the term 'woman' radically undefined because no definition can include all of its possible aspects and meanings. In my view it is not difficult to notice the basic deconstructivist element in this approach that any (linguistic) sign is marked by what Derrida calls différance. Signifier and signified, sign and referent can never be present at the same time (in someone's mind) and yet one can not 'exist' without the other. Instead of understanding the different feminist strands and their methodological concepts as components of an all-embracing and universal theory (that leads to women's liberation and equality), Elam

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[158] The term identity is erased to indicate that it does not represent a universal, a-historical and trans-cultural essence but functions as a reminder for the ethical responsibility to frequently review the provisional and limited alliances between the many heterogeneous groups of women. This is also an example of post-modernism's (post-feminism's) preference to use the apparently all embracing term feminism in its plural form, thus speaking of *feminisms*. (See Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy*, 100.)

[159] Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, 7-8.

uses the concept of the 'mise en abyme' to suggest that the feminist search for the meaning of 'being-a-woman' should never come to an end.[160] This 'heuristic' openness could be understood as a negation of the desire to find a definite essence which opens up the possibility for more freedom and justice in the way the sexes communicate with each other.[161]

One is thus confronted with the paradox that it is not only impossible to find an adequate representation or definition of 'being-a-woman', but furthermore that the 'being-of-a-woman' does not exist independently from and prior to its representation. This is an important interpretative tool for a critical assessment of feminist practices whose methodology is based on women-specific experiences and whose preferred mode of representing these experiences is an autobiographical writing. The difficulty of this important and very influential feminist trend is the general arbitrariness of one's own experiences. Autobiographical data are thus no 'raw' material that the subject has unmediated access to, because human experiences are always already discoursively mediated. Even if it would be possible to represent personal experiences in a 'pure' way, one could still not be sure to what extent the 'raw' data had been distorted when they were put together. Committing herself to uncensored openness can not serve as assurance either that the represented autobiographical material is indeed an authentic description of the author's 'being-a-woman'.

Using the picture of the 'mise en abyme' once more, one could formulate that all autobiographical writing that is accessible to other women can never be more than a 'cropped' image within the infinite chain of mirror images of the 'mise en abyme'. Instead of constructing all-inclusive metaphors for the 'essence of woman', it seems more realistic to understand autobiographical writing as a metonymical (serial) representation of subjective and fragmentary experiences. In Elam's view this is a possible solution to the dilemma in the feminist search for women's own voice. Traditionally women have been excluded from the position of the author and were thus denied the chance to develop a 'women-specific' language. This also explains the increasing critique of the imperative to contribute to women's liberation through the installation of a female 'author-subject' in the traditional sense. In a patriarchal society the supposedly gender-neutral subject is always already a male biased subject, which is marked by autonomy, rationality and the will to master its surrounding environment (i.e. the object world). In Irigarays words: "It is man who has been the subject of discourse, whether in the field of theory, morality or politics."[162] Instead of viewing the

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[160] A 'Mise en abyme' in the visual field is the effect of two mirrors facing each other, thereby producing an infinite number of identical, yet increasingly smaller images.

[161] See Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, 28.

[162] Irigaray, "Sexual Difference." *The Irigaray Reader*, 166.

subject-status as a necessary precondition for women to write their own history and to develop their own identity and political will, it is essential to reverse this approach and re-write history and change the education system, knowing that this will automatically 'produce' different subjects.

The rejection of the a priori status of the subject is closely related to another deconstructive and feminist conviction, which is to begin one's critical work regardless of the random circumstances of time and place.

> 'Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organisation of a subject, or even of modernity. It deconstructs itself. It can be deconstructed.' (...) Derrida's remarks do not so much apply to feminism as call attention to what is already deconstructive about feminism: the taking place as event without subjective agency or defining historical epoch.[163]

The necessity, or at least openness for deconstructing one's own texts is an important element in post-feminisms. Although the problem how to determine the 'essence of woman' might generally be insoluble, in certain historical and political situations it is necessary to take up a quasi-essentialist standpoint in order to initiate the deconstruction of male dominated discourses (phallogocentrism). This is seen as part of a deconstructive feminist 'strategy' in the earlier work of Spivak who tolerates essentialism if only as part of a movement that allows one to speak at all. Even though these provisional claims and positions need to be deconstructed themselves, they allow for a speech that a fundamentalist deconstruction would silence completely.[164] The use of any word assumes, at least for a moment, that it has a referent in order for it to signify in the social praxis or speech or writing (even if we do not believe in referents as such) where we believe (at least provisionally and playfully) in the 'I' (the subject) who speaks or writes.[165] If we fail to deconstruct this 'I' or any other sign then we fall into the essentialist (logocentric) trap and lay further foundations for totalitarianisms. This is where deconstruction is not to be taken as a fundamentalism as many of its critics want to claim. It is not a question of having to choose between 'to be or not to be' but rather a means of allowing the simultaneity of being and non-being (or any other sign/trace couplet) to freely

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[163] Irigaray, "Sexual Difference." *The Irigaray Reader*, 12.

[164] One could argue that a culture that did not take language literally could happily speak without fear of essentialism, without referent, and without autonomous subject. In anthropology and transpersonal psychology this theme has been explored in the work of Joseph Campbell and Ken Wilber for example, where the basis of shamanism and indeed magic rests on the psychological commitment to a constructed universe and where changes to that construct bring about changes to the universe viz. magic works in these cultures.

[165] Some would suggest that a logocentric universe is one that needs referents. Break or transcend/transform that logocentrism and the need for a referent disappears.

contradict each other. If we fear contradiction, we will be compelled to grasp an essentialism of some form and then erect an edifice to protect it. In this sense one can understand the critique of contemporary feminists about several projects from the beginning of the 'second wave' of feminism (in the seventies and eighties) as another attempt to overcome the hierarchically structured opposites between men and women.[166]

The problematic nature of the claim for an equal subject-status can be demonstrated through another element in deconstructive-feminist text interpretations, viz. the traditional differentiation between a person's natural (biological) sex and his or her culturally acquired gender-specific behaviour (sexual preferences). The general question seems to be whether the biological sex is an a priori and culture-independent fact (on which the natural development of a set of behaviour is based) or whether it is a cultural construction which has only been labelled 'natural' in order to disguise the underlying power interests? It is not difficult to understand that both scenarios inevitably produce serious difficulties for feminists. If the first case was true the immediate response would be to try to uncover the true core of the biological sex behind the female gender roles (again the search for the essence of woman). If the second scenario was the case feminists would face the problem that they had to criticise traditional gender-specific behaviour without referring to something that is external to the dominant discourses (also called reality).

Instead of searching for an exact definition of the relation between sex and gender, the main aim of deconstructive feminism is to expose and promote the relative instability of both positions and what this means for their respective cultural circumstances. Thus the goal can not be to completely abolish differences between the sexes but to make the boundaries more permeable.[167] For this project to happen it is of greatest importance to understand one's innate sex as partly culturally constructed, even though it appears to be a persons' natural quality.[168]

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[166] One example for a self-deconstruction of a previous feminist programme is the 'abolition' of the call for sexual liberation in the sixties and seventies. During the 'sexual revolution' it became clear that the increased sexual freedom did not automatically lead to a decrease of women's sexual exploitation. (See Irigaray "The Necessity for Sexuate Rights." *The Irigaray Reader*, 200.) Another example is the attempt to ban or censor pornography, which for many women (feminists) is the symbol of misogyny and male dominance. Yet history has shown that the abolition of the 'symptom' (pornography) does not necessarily lessen its supposed cause (sexual violence). One can even find reasons for the assumption that real sexual violence is more common in societies which see pornography as instigation for violence against women (and therefore have it banned) than in societies which do not censor pornography (or only to some extent).

[167] One of the key problems in fundamentalism and totalitarianism is the rigidity of the line that divides differences. Indeed, differences tend to become hardened into polarised opposites as part of the totalitarian project – otherwise one could not justify the exertion of unilateral power over the Other/enemy/inhuman. A project capable of loosening the boundary of difference – to allow differences to be exchanged and transformed from time to time, is also a project capable of liberating both oppressor and oppressed from the ground of oppressions as such. It is this tampering with the hyphen which destabilises polarity and can allow difference to simply be difference.

[168] See Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, 56-7.

4.4 Phallus and Seeing in Psychoanalysis

Feminists have always been attracted to psychoanalytical theory when discussing the cultural construction of the various sex categories. One of the main themes in psychoanalytical theory focuses on the way in which the biological sex of a person is represented in the psychological realm. However, as was the case with the appropriation of the previously discussed critical (philosophical) theories, feminists are aware that psychoanalysis is another very ambivalent theory whose subversive potential is buried under a layer of phallogocentrism. Yet, instead of dismissing Freud as being generally misogynist, many feminists have come to accept that he too was 'only' a child of his times which influenced the larger frame of reference of his theories. Because of our historically distanced viewpoint, we now have the possibility to uncover Freud's theoretical 'blind spots', to put him on the couch and deconstruct (or psychoanalyse) him with his own tools. One very influential contribution to this project comes from French feminists who uncovered a similar phallogocentrism in Lacan's texts.

One of the basic assumptions of Freud's theory of sexuality is clearly visible in his concept of the 'instinctual representative' which means that a drive (instinct) per se can never become conscious, except for its 'ideational representatives'.[169] The drive stands at the threshold between the somatic and the psychic sphere and is, in its conscious and also pre-conscious mode, always already linguistically shaped, i.e. culturally determined. Freud's differentiation between the 'aim of a drive' and the 'object of a drive' and their original unspecific state means, that the sex-drive has neither a natural and a priori 'sex-object' nor a natural and specific way that leads to its 'satisfaction'.[170] According to his understanding of the sexuality of children, every human being (independent of its sex) has to go through a phase which he described as 'polymorph perverse' (the pre-oedipal phase) in which the opposite between male and female does not yet exist but only the difference between active and passive aims of a drive. Only through the course of time, a child learns to suppress certain 'drive-aims' and 'drive-objects' and to reinforce others, always in accordance with specific cultural rules that relate to its sex.[171] Moira Gatens writes about this issue:

> It is largely through the vehicle of sexuality that the child is socialised, that is, through sexual pleasure and the processes of sexual differentiation. This

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The difficulties that arise in 'lesbian communities' also underscore the importance of a general in-definiteness of the relation between sex and gender. Even though lesbian women belong to the same sex, they certainly develop more than just one gender-specific set of (sexual) behaviours. Yet the idea that homosexual relationships would lead to the elimination of gender-specific hierarchies is another utopia which post-modern ('post-feminist') feminists seek to deconstruct.

[169] See J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, 535-6.

[170] See Freud, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes." *Collected Works*, Vol.14.

> socialisation acts directly on and through the body of the child and the pleasures of that body. Hence, personal identity is always, and fundamentally, an embodied, sexed identity.[172]

In the same way one has to understand the heterosexual organisation of the sex-drive which prevails under adults in our society.[173] Some of the main problems and contradictions in Freud's theory surface when he seeks to explain the different effects of the Oedipus complex for boys and girls. According to Freud, at the age of 3-5 years the male child is forced to give up his oedipal attitude under the threat of the castration complex. That means that he accepts the phallic superiority of the father and his 'entitlement' to the mother. The development of the female child is quite different and does not progress in an analogous way, due to the fact that the first 'love-object' of the little girl is a person of the same sex (the mother). In order to install a heterosexual libidinal position in the female child it is necessary that she enters into an oedipal relation to her parents by developing the notorious 'penis-envy'. In Freud's view the Oedipus complex of the young female child represents, thus, a secondary formation that has lesser psychological power than the complementary castration complex of a young boy.

One of the stumbling blocks of this concept and starting point for the vehement critique by feminists of the Freudian interpretation of child sexuality is his characterisation of the pre-oedipal sexuality of boys and girls as both phallic (male). Accordingly the clitoris has to be understood as an organ that is homologous to the penis[174], and whose libidinal cathexis is given up only because of the trauma that is caused through the realisation of her 'castratedness'. Freud remarks that "(t)he budding woman, frightened by the comparison of herself with boys, becomes dissatisfied with her clitoris and gives up her phallic activity (...) She acknowledges the fact of her castration, the consequent superiority of the male and her own inferiority."[175] And elsewhere he writes: "When a little girl has sight of a male genital organ and so discovers her own deficiency, she does not accept the unwelcome knowledge without hesitation and reluctance."[176] Freud also assumes that men (including young male

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[171] Rules which are imposed upon the child through the cause of primary socialisation in its very early years.

[172] Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy*, 104.

[173] See Freud, "Three Essays on Sexuality." *Collected Works*, vol.7, 125-7.
Freud has repeatedly used the example of manifest homosexuality to demonstrate the possibility that the child's libidinal organisation can become fixated to one of the pre-oedipal stages. Whether Freud's theory about the genesis of homosexuality is coherent or not has been subject of much debate also outside of psychoanalytical circles. What is important though is the fact that this is another example of the 'artificiality' (cultural dependency) of our sexual behaviour.

[174] "First of all, there can be no doubt that the bisexual disposition which we maintain to be characteristic of human beings manifests itself much more plainly in the female than in the male. The latter has only one principal sexual zone – only one sexual organ – whereas the former has two: the vagina, the true female organ, and the clitoris, which is analogous to the male organ." (Freud, "Female Sexuality." *Collected Works*, vol.5, 255.)

[175] Freud, "Female Sexuality." *Collected Works*, vol.5, 257.

[176] Freud, "Female Sexuality." *Collected Works*, vol.5, 261.

children) in general have the same negative attitude towards the female sexual organs.[177] This is at the same time the precondition for his concept of the female penis envy. In his view during the course of the 'normal' development of the female child the penis envy is first related to the father and transforms later (through the metonymical displacement penis = child) into the wish to have a child.

It is not difficult to understand why feminists label Freud's model phallocentric. Critical analysis shows that, what is presented to us as an universal principle in the onto-genesis of every human being, is in fact a projection of specific culturally generated and determined conditions. For example, it is impossible to understand the presumably 'traumatic' perception of the sexual difference between the sexes as a 'pure' and objective sensuous perception, because it is in fact the suppression of difference or a kind of disownment. Jane Gallop notices in this context the implicit connection between phallocentric and ocularcentric theory which are both based on a symmetrical model of representation.

> Nothing to see, nothing that looks like a phallus, nothing of like measure (summetros), no coherent visual representation in a familiar form. Nothing to see becomes nothing of worth. The privilege of sight over other senses, ocularcentrism, supports and unifies phallocentric, sexual theory (theory - from the Greek *theoria*, from *theoros*, 'spectator', from *thea*, 'a viewing').[178]

What Freud presents to us as difference between the sexes, feminists understand as absence of sexual difference. When he explains that until a certain age young children do not see (notice) that female persons do not have a penis, it becomes clear that his theory (his own sight) is also marked by a 'blind spot'. Another example for his biased attitude is the assumption of the female Oedipus complex (which he also calls 'Elektra complex'). Here too it is the disappointment because of a (the mother's) lacking penis that is responsible for a change of the original libidinal formation. It seems obvious that Freud's 'blindness' was not merely a private attitude but the outspoken expression of a universal epistemic condition of the time, which made the phallomorphic standards appear to be a natural a priori. It would be a mistake to doubt the 'authenticity' of Freud's observations during the analytical settings, because his patients did indeed show the symptoms in question (castration anxiety, penis envy,

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[177] "One residue of the castration complex in the man is a measure of disparagement in his attitude towards women, whom he regards as having been castrated." (Freud, "Female Sexuality." *Collected Works*, vol.5, 257.)

[178] Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction. Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, 58.
The importance Freud assigns to the recognition (sighting) of the penis is clearly visible in his explanation of the genesis of homosexual and fetishist behaviour. According to his analytic work, both cases result in the denial of the fact that women do not have a penis. Homosexuals though replace the 'normal' love-object through an individual with a penis, whereas the fetishist exchanges the 'normal' aim of the drive with one of the 'fore-

Oedipus/Elektra complex). The important point though is that he was not able to interpret them as secondary (derived) formations and phenomena.[179]

In many aspects the critique of Freud's phallocentric theory of sexuality holds true for Lacanian psychoanalysis as well. The meaning of Lacan's concepts such as 'the name of the father', 'the symbolic', 'the phallus as master signifier', 'the non-existence of woman', etc. are based on the same representation of sexual difference as sexual opposition, which positions woman in an inferior and complementary role. Irigaray, who is one of the most prominent representatives of French feminism (and also vehement critic of Lacan), received her education as analyst at Lacan's school but was later expelled from his psychoanalytical society. One of Irigaray's main concerns is to create a women-specific language (an 'écriture féminine') that takes into account female morphology without its phallocratic attributes of castratedness, deformity, mutilation and non-existence. Paradoxically, for Irigaray this new language would be the pre-condition for a heterosexual society in the true sense, because the positive difference between the sexes would not be reduced to the phallocratic model of a privileged presence and its complementary absence.

However, it would be difficult to describe this écriture féminine in positive terms because, until recently, women were not given the chance of creating a symbolic sphere that is founded on their specific morphology. Irigaray puts it this way:

> What a feminine Syntax might be is not simple nor easy to state, because in that 'syntax' there would no longer be either subject or object, 'oneness' would no longer be privileged, there would no longer be proper meanings, proper names, 'proper' attributes ... Instead, that syntax would involve nearness, proximity, but in such an extreme form that it would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation.[180]

Irigaray contrasts the 'unity' and dominance of the phallus with an unheard-of symbolism of the various female sex organs, which are set up in an intertwined and complex co-existence that does not account for a body with definite contours. For example, the labia can be understood as a symbol for a continuous self-affection and non-mediated nearness.

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pleasure', which enables him to give it the meaning of the missing penis or phallus. (See Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children." *Collected Works*, vol.9, 207-9.)

[179] The implicit connection between phallocentrism and ocularcentrism will again be an important point in the next chapter where we discuss the way pornography portrays (women's) sexuality. From that perspective one could ask, whether photography is a phallocratic medium per se that allows a feminine seeing only in rare instances.

[180] Irigaray, "Questions." *The Irigaray Reader*, 136.

> Woman can touch herself 'within herself', in advance of any recourse to instruments. (...) Her sex, 'in itself', touches itself all the time. On the other hand, no effort is spared to prevent (...) her from touching herself: the valorisation of the masculine sex alone, the reign of the phallus and its logic of meaning and its systems of representation, these are just some of the ways woman's sex is cut off from itself and woman is deprived of her 'self-affection.[181]

The feminist attempt to develop a language which does not treat femininity as either non-existent or as a mystery, has been criticised by Lacan and his disciples by arguing that the phallus is a sex-neutral concept (neither of the sexes possesses it.) Yet, one has to ask why Lacan uses a synonym for the highly significant (biased) term 'penis' to explain a supposedly neutral concept (the phallus)?[182] In this sense the phallus is as biased as the subject, which (in Lacan's view) begins to exist when the young child leaves the pre-oedipal phase in order to enter the symbolic sphere.

It is important to emphasise that Irigaray's 'écriture féminine' does not represent a new theory of femininity which would outline definitions of female subjectivity in regard to the new master signifier of 'female morphology'. Under the current circumstances it seems more efficient to expose the phallocentric structures of the prevailing discourses in order to produce in-commensurable concepts that resist being swallowed by that tradition.

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[181] Irigaray, "Questions." *The Irigaray Reader*, 135.
See Irigaray, "Volume Without Contours." *The Irigaray Reader*, 53-67.
[182] See Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, 96.

Chapter 5

Real Violence or Fantasised Desire? Feminist Positions in the Debate about Pornography

As previously mentioned, this chapter focuses on the question of the status of woman in pornographic images. After all this is still a central theme in feminist debates and it also is a prime example of demonstrating their diversity and programmatical frictions. Yet, instead of presenting a complete and neutral overview of the arguments for and against pornography, I am going to concentrate on those positions which, for different reasons, come out against governmentally sanctioned censorship of pornography. There are a number of reasons which speak for such a selection: As we have seen in the last chapter, a large number of the feminists who amalgamated in the divers 'anti-pornography-movements', base their political demands on the concept of an enmity between a 'good femininity' and a generally 'bad masculinity'.[183] Transferred onto the field of sexuality (which, generally speaking, pornography aims to present as a spectacle) we are confronted with the following two conflicting views: On the one hand there is an emotionally fulfilling, non-hierarchic, erotic, non-violent, non-phallic female sexuality, and on the other hand there is an insensitive, dominant, pornographic, aggressive and phallic male sexuality. It is again of no importance whether these adjectives are understood to be congenital or learned behaviour or a combination of them, because in the perspective of this feminist strand, they are both leading to a 'status quo' in patriarchal society which they have labelled forced heterosexuality. This term does not only mean the prevailing tendency to accept heterosexuality as normal sexual behaviour, but also the force (pressure, violence) that men often exert on women in traditional heterosexual relationships.

Andrea Dworkin, who is one of the most notorious figures in the anti-porn movement and widely known for her relentless condemnation of men's (sexual) domination, expresses this biased viewpoint in the following words:

> The sex act means penile intromission followed by penile thrusting, of fucking. The woman is acted on; the man acts and through action expresses sexual power, the power of masculinity. Fucking requires that the male act on one who has less power and this valuation is so deep, so completely implicit in the

[183] The hardening of difference here can lead to fundamentalism and totalitarianism as previously discussed.

act, that the one who is fucked is stigmatized as feminine during the act even when not anatomically female.[184]

And elsewhere one reads:

> Male sexual power is the substance of culture. It resonates everywhere. The celebration of rape in story, song, and science is the paradigmatic articulation of male sexual power as a cultural absolute. The conquering of the woman acted out in fucking, her possession, her use as a thing, is the scenario endlessly repeated, with or without direct reference to fucking, throughout culture.[185]

It does not require much analysis to figure out that Dworkin's standpoint is far more radical than Plaza's slogan (from the last chapter) which stated that potentially every man is a rapist. According to Dworkin's and her main ally Catharine McKinnon's beliefs (experiences?), every man who engages in a heterosexual relationship inevitably becomes a real rapist. McKinnon thus states: "Compare victim's reports of rape with women's reports of sex. They look a lot alike ... The major distinction between intercourse (normal) and rape (abnormal) is that the normal happens so often that one cannot get anyone to see anything wrong with it."[186]

In the course of this chapter we will repeatedly come across these and other very similar characterisations of heterosexuality, because for anti-porn feminists it seems possible to directly draw conclusions about the effects that are caused by the pornographic depiction of supposedly degrading and violent behaviour. The universal and radical nature of the allegations of this particular feminist faction negates all initiatives to find alternatives for this horror-scenario. Every differing opinion is answered by an effusion of totalitarian rhetoric.[187] Interestingly, even those women are not spared from this hate-campaign who (for various reasons) oppose censorship of pornography, or for whom (hetero-) sexuality is a pleasant experience or who are just lucky that they do not suffer the traumas from sexual or physical abuse. Leanne Katz comments on this marginalising discourse: "Opposition to their activities is called 'slander', and 'hate campaigns'; we are charged with being manipulated by 'pimps',

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[184] Dworkin, *Pornography. Men Possessing Women*, 23.

[185] Dworkin, *Pornography. Men Possessing Women*, 23.

[186] McKinnon quoted in Nadine Strossen, *Defending Pornography*, 108.
According to McKinnon's logic this leads to the following equation: "Men see rape as intercourse; feminists say much intercourse 'is' rape ... feminism stresses the indistinguishability of prostitution, marriage, and sexual harassment." (McKinnon quoted in Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (eds.), *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, 77.)

[187] See Dworkin, *Pornography. Men Possessing Women*, 52.

with being mouthpieces of pornographers. We are accused of being indifferent to violence against women, the Uncle Toms of patriarchy."[188]

Whilst most of the anti-porn feminists claim to speak for all feminists (and this image has been widely accepted by the public) there is an increasing number of voices, from around the mid-eighties, who try to approach the cultural phenomenon of pornography not with a corpus of tighter laws, but instead with alternative methods of interpretation and analysis which allows them to uncover a variety of meanings beyond the strictly literal understanding, which is dominant among anti-porn feminists. Thus the spectrum of these alternative voices comprises many different theoretical and political approaches and is the work of people from very heterogeneous social and economic fields. Contrary to the anti-porn movement which, to a large extent, consists of academically educated, white middle-class women, post-modern (post-structuralist, post-feminist) feminists attempt to include into their projects women (and men) from all social and economical backgrounds (moving away from polarised arguments). For example, the contributors in contemporary anthologies on this subject are often not only university lecturers and other professional writers but also those who are usually their object of study. People who work with or in the sex-industry such as prostitutes, porn-actors, HIV-activists, freelance writers, film-makers, photographers, performance-artists and a number of social-workers without academic qualifications. They all work in the interests of those who are pushed into illegality because of the criminalisation of large parts of the sex industry.[189] Instead of excluding those who tend to have a different standpoint or who lead a politically 'incorrect' lifestyle, (post-) feminists not only tolerate heterogeneity and difference, but actively support and accept it as part of a broader strategy to find alternatives for the stereotypical gender-roles in patriarchal societies. It is their goal not to condemn heterosexual sexuality in general, despite the disappointment about the shortcomings of the 'sexual revolution'. They too realised that the amount of sexual violence that women suffer was not automatically reduced, and that the newly discovered hedonistic and egalitarian principles failed to be reliable 'tools' to abolish the power-relations between the sexes.[190]

Another important reason why this chapter addresses the 'post-feminist' strand of feminism (which explicitly contests the anti-porn feminist's attempt to produce political strategies and make decisions presumably in the best interest of all feminists/women) is its varied and

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[188] Leanne Katz quoted in Strossen, *Defending Pornography*, 33.

[189] See "The Wages of Anti-censorship Campaigning: Feminists Against Censorship." *Bad Girls & Dirty Pictures*. Edited by Alison Assiter and Avedon Carol. 146-50.

[190] In the eyes of some feminists, the sexual revolution (liberation) lead in fact to an increase of sexual exploitation of women. (See "Sweet Sorrows, Painful Pleasures." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*. Edited by Segal and McIntosh, 78.)

creative appropriation and use of psychoanalytic, deconstructive and genealogical theory. One could label this methodological manoeuvre as 'subversiveness from within'. The lack of a specific female language (theory) which was one of the main findings of the last chapter is also noticeable in the analyses of pornographic images and texts. Psychoanalytical theory is treated in a similar way. Instead of completely dismissing Freud and the psychoanalytical tradition, quite a number of feminists managed to utilise Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis in a very productive way for their striving to dethrone the phallus in (heterosexual) pornographic contexts. This theme will be discussed in more detail in the second section of this chapter where we focus on the question: What factors and conditions have to be fulfilled in order for pornography to properly function, to unfold its sexually stimulating effects on the specific audience it is aiming at?

This will provide us with interpretative tools that are not limited to pornographic images, but can also be applied to imagery in mainstream media such as magazines, newspapers, advertising etc. One could thus formulate that the construction of sexual identity and desire is not a privilege of the pornographic discourse (although it definitely is its central theme), because it plays a major role in many other spheres of society. Yet, this does not mean that our whole everyday life has become 'pornographic' (as many opponents of pornography bemoan[191]), but instead shows that it does not make sense to draw a strict line between pornography and erotica (serious culture, art and mass-culture, entertainment).

We will come back to this issue later because it is an important touchstone in the dispute concerning censorship and banning of pornography. Every new legislative initiative must be able to define what pornography exactly is. To create unambiguous definitions of the obscene is a problem which has always made life difficult for the custodians of decency and morals. For example, along Dworkin's and McKinnon's draft of a new bill (which came to parliamentary vote in a number of US-states but was eventually accepted in a slightly altered form in Canada only) goes a fundamental change in the definition of pornography, its 'hazardous' effects for the public health and the possibilities of taking legal proceedings against its producers and traffickers. The bill, accepted in 1984 by the Minneapolis City Council (though shortly after it was declared illegal by a number of courts) was based on proposals from McKinnon and Dworkin which qualified everything as pornographic and

[191] See for example Naomi Wolf's otherwise informative book *The beauty myth*, where she constantly laments the 'beauty pornography' that prevails in Western capitalism. Instead of a true analysis of the term (concept) pornography, she unwittingly supports the tendency to assign pornography with meanings such as 'dirty', 'indecent', 'immoral', 'exploitative', 'sexist' etc.

therefore illegal, whose explicit sexual content contributes to women's subjugation and suppression. Strossen writes:

> Declaring that pornography 'is a practice of sex discrimination,' the law authorizes civil lawsuits for damages and injunctive relief for four offences: 'trafficking in pornography', 'coercion into pornography', 'forcing pornography on a person', and 'assault or physical attack due to pornography'. All four offences are linked by the common - and hopelessly vague - definition of pornography as 'graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words.[192]

What the term 'subordination' means in this context, is explained by Dworkin and McKinnon in eight further short definitions which are a license to understand basically every sexually explicit representation as an appeal for (and documentation of) the discrimination and suppression of women. Interestingly, the feminist disdain and disgust is not only provoked by scenarios which show (in the widest sense) sadomasochistic behaviour, but generally by every presentation (depiction) that displays women and/or single body parts functioning as a sex-object. In Dworkin's prose: "Pornography is defined as the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women in pictures and/or words that also includes women presented (...) in postures or positions of sexual (...) display; or women's body parts - including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, buttocks - exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts;"[193] The real coup of this standpoint though is that once and for all the guilty party for an endless number of injustices and mishaps that women suffer has been located and cornered: pornography and all its 'lobbyists'.

Under the proposed law, pornography could be held accountable for things like self-esteem problems caused by the feeling of physical imperfection, anger and depression as reaction to misogynist contents of pornographic texts and pictures and, of course, for real rape or physical abuse. In all of these examples, pornography would be seen as the real cause for their damaging effects for women. According to Dworkin, "(t)he premises of pornography are controlling in every rape and every rape case, whenever a woman is battered or prostituted, in incest (...) and in murder - murders of women by husbands, lovers, and serial killers."[194] Paradoxically, the rapists and murderers Dworkin is aiming at would profit from the anti-pornography laws as well, because they would then be able to transfer their responsibility

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[192] Strossen, *Defending Pornography*, 75.
[193] Dworkin, *Pornography*, xxxiii.
[194] Dworkin, *Pornography*, p.xxxix.

partly to the producers and traffickers of pornography who 'incited' them to commit these crimes.[195]

5.1 Critique of the Feminist Fundamentalism

The crisis of the apparently uniform anti-porn feminism of the late seventies and eighties took its course from 'within', i.e. through the increasing awareness that certain individuals and sub-groups in the movement were again deprived of the right for autonomy and self-determination. Yet, this time not by the main enemy 'patriarchy', but by the political mentors from their own ranks. In Derrida's terminology one could characterise the anti-anti-porn movement as a kind of self-deconstruction of former standpoints which, for a limited time, seemed to be necessary and essential in order to be politically effective. In the light of this self-reflective agenda, the unambiguous binarisms and identity-founding definitions of male and female sexuality, which were employed by anti-porn feminists as counter concepts to the prevailing codes of heterosexuality, turned out to be as sexist, moralistic and racist as their original targets. Although it might sound absurd, quite a number of post- (anti-pornography) feminists have come to the conclusion that the anti-porn movement itself 'produces' pornography. By means analysing Victorian prudishness and decency, Foucault has demonstrated that what looks at first like the suppression (pushing into invisibility) of everything sexual from the public sphere, has as a necessary consequence the compulsion to understand and regulate sexuality in all its facets. Thus the remarkable inflation of the discourses on sexuality in many spheres of society.

Linda Williams who became one of the leading figures in the anti-censorship faction through her psychoanalytical and post-structuralist interpretations of pornography in cinema, senses a similar dynamics at work in the attempt to ban pornography. She writes that

> (i)t is no accident, for example, that the origin of the feminist 'sex wars', of which the bitter debates about pornography have been an offshoot, began with (...) the 'return of the repressed' of a certain 'bad girl' sexuality in the form of lesbian sadomasochism. The feminist lesbian sadomasochist has arguably been

[195] See Claudia "Fear of Pornography." *Bad Girls & Dirty Pictures*. Edited by Assiter and Avedon. 134. See also Carole S. Vance, "Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General's Comission on Pornography." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*. Edited by Segal and McIntosh.

> the key provoking agent of these wars, unsettling all the comfortable received opinions about sexual power, pleasure and perversion.[196]

What Williams calls 'bad girl sexuality' (in the understanding of anti-porn feminists) comprises basically all sexual practices that have a phallic element. In an extreme form this leads to the opinion that chastity in platonic relationships between lesbians should be the political goal. In this context the term political lesbianism was coined which means - inter alia - women's 'freedom' to choose homosexuality over their 'natural' sexual preferences. Yet, this project too had its negative side-effects which to acknowledge bore the painful insight (truth) that the battle against heterosexual sexism can not be won by abolishing heterosexuality per se. In this sense, Assiter and Carol talk about the constructed relationships between political lesbians and 'natural' lesbians who, in the end, had to acknowledge that they were in fact only second choice.[197]

In general one could conclude that the main problem of this 'separatist' feminism is not only its refusal of heterosexuality but also its dismissal of all heterogeneous sexual behaviour in homosexual relationships. Thus, fundamentalist feminists unwittingly repeat what they disapprove of in the prevailing structures of patriarchal society, viz. the definitive formation of gender-specific behaviour according to norms that apparently have a biological origin. In my view this is the only way to understand the rage and anger that hits all those who disobey the position of the politically correct feminist and/or lesbian. This anger is legitimated through the argument that women's disloyalty inevitably leads to male-chauvinist invasion and infiltration that needs to be dealt with in the same rigorous manner.[198] Other examples for this kind of behaviour are the attempts to boycott sexually explicit material, made by lesbians for lesbians even if it does not contain S/M material. This concerns not only those who do not comply to their political agendas but also a great number of women who work in the sex-industry. Again, there are supposedly only two alternatives: a woman who works as a prostitute or porn-actress has either been coerced into doing so by pimps and porn-producers, or because of a 'false consciousness', she has become an ally of male chauvinism. And this false consciousness becomes visible "as a species of psychological addiction, built on self-

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[196] Linda Williams, "Pornography "On/Scene." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 248.

[197] See Assiter & Carol, *Bad Girls & Dirty Pictures*, 6.

[198] Referring to this viewpoint, Assiter and Carol mention an example of a group of radical feminists that targeted lesbian sadomasochism, because in their eyes S/M glorifies violence against women and furthermore does not represent a genuine expression of female sexuality. Masked with hoods and equipped with crowbars a S/M dyke club was raided, the furniture smashed up and also some of the customers injured; "- this in the name of *protecting* women from violence." (Assiter & Carol, *Bad Girls & Dirty Pictures*, 8.)

hatred through the act of sale by which a whore is defined."[199] This is a bold example of the fact that a fundamentalist feminism, which assumes to represent all women equally, can not pursue this goal without arbitrary 'ad hoc' exclusions. Thus, women who declare that they work in the sex-industry voluntarily and without bad conscience are not considered worthy to be represented and supported.[200] Yet, in order for fundamentalist feminists not to appear sexist or moralistic themselves, it is necessary to uncover the patriarchal, phallic and pornographic element which can be held responsible for the unacceptable behaviour of the 'fallen women' (e.g. sex workers).

Despite the substantial critique from post-feminists about the political claim for censorship of pornography and the motives behind it, there is a general agreement between the two factions in regard to some important positions. No post-feminist disputes that patriarchal society is full of moments of sexism, suppression and violence against women, and it is consequently a common goal of all feminists to change these conditions to the advantage of women. In this sense, post-feminists are also very aware of the often overtly noticeable ideological elements in pornography. Yet, the stumbling block that splits the two feminist factions is the question of which way the proposed changes should be carried out, and to what ends (setting up a female Arcadia or living in an increasingly deconstructed patriarchal society). Anti-censorship feminists aim at preventing women's liberation and emancipation from the concrete disadvantages that would inevitably follow governmentally sanctioned censorship of pornography. What might look at first sight like a draconian, yet fair means to reduce sexism and violence against women, is in the viewpoint of post-feminists an ineffective and neither scientifically nor philosophically justifiable labouring at the symptoms of deeply rooted injustices.

Anti-censorship feminists aim their critique not only at the aforementioned equation of heterosexuality and the suppression (abuse, rape) of women, but also at two other arguments that are commonly given to bolster the claim for banning pornography: viz. 1) the assumption that photographs always literally express (mean) what they depict, and 2) that the ideological, or rather 'educational' element in pornographic representations has such power that it necessarily leads to a simple behaviourism (stimulus –> reaction). Thus the feminist slogan: 'Pornography is the theory - rape the practise'. In Dworkin's perspective pornography is not

[199] Kate Millet, "Sexual Politics." *Bad Girls & Dirty Pictures*. Edited by Assiter & Carol. 132.

[200] See Strossen, "Defending Pornography." 212-4. See also Williams: "A Provoking Agent. The Pornography and Performance Art of Annie Sprinkle." *Dirty Looks*. Edited by Pamela Gibson and Roma Gibson. 179.

the 'theatrical' performance of sexual fantasies but the documentation of real sexual violence against women.[201] In other words: all pornography is 'snuff'!

The sexual acts performed by the models (actresses) for the camera are understood to be perverse and humiliating per se. Therefore it seems rational to declare that pornographic photographs and films are documentations of perverse indignities and oppressions. For Gayle Rubin though, this is less a matter of women's political freedom and bodily intactness than merely a question of taste.[202] As we will shortly see, this is also the point where the strange and often silent alliances between anti-porn feminists and conservative guardians of morals and decency form. Without the assumption that the sexual acts in pornographic depictions are oppression and rape per se, it sounds naive to say that pornography is the documentation of real events. No other film genre makes us believe that the actors really suffer (experience) what is apparently captured on film.

What other arguments do anti-porn feminists use to justify their assertions? The 'magic word' has already been mentioned, viz. the so called 'snuff-movie'. This is the title of a film genre that shows real events where people are being raped, tortured and murdered. In contrast to documentaries that sometimes show similar things, the events in snuff are especially set up for the camera, whereas documentaries capture what is 'randomly' happening 'out there' in the world. However, it has been suggested that the existence of snuff movies has not yet been proven (or is at least very rare), and most allegedly true snuff films that became the object of public investigation have been a more or less successful (believable) variant of the very first snuff film 'Snuff' (thus the name of this genre). The movie 'Snuff' which was first shown in the USA in 1976 was a 'B-Porn-Slasher-Movie' and ended with the following notorious scene. After the pregnant main actress is stabbed to death the camera zooms back and opens up the view onto the filmset, the camera operator, the director and the rest of the crew. One of the script girls tells the director that the last scene had 'turned her on' whereupon they engage in a

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[201] Dworkin writes in her notoriously harsh style: "Real women are tied up, stretched, hanged, fucked, gang-banged, whipped, beaten, and begging for more. In the photographs and films, real women are used as *porneia* and real women are depicted as *porneia*. (...) This book is distinguished from most other books on pornography by its bedrock conviction that the power is real, the cruelty is real, the sadism is real, the subordination is real." (Dworkin, *Pornography*, 201 and xxxvii.)

[202] In "Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong," Rubin writes:

> In their characterization of pornography as a documentary of abuse, both Dworkin and MacKinnon appear to think that certain sexual activities are so inherently distasteful that no one would do them willingly, and therefore the models are 'victims' who must have been forced to participate against their will. (...) For example, Mackinnon has also described porn in which someone was 'raped in the throat where a penis cannot go'. There are plenty of gay men, and even a good number of heterosexual women, who enjoy cock-sucking. There are even lesbians who relish going down on dildos. (...) Embedded in the idea of porn as a documentary of abuse is a very narrow conception of human sexuality, one lacking even elementary notions

'sex-number' that is not part of the film script. After a short time she realises that the camera is again running and filming them, yet when she then tries to pull out the director murders her with a long knife (doubling the original last scene). The important bit which lets the viewer wonder about the peculiar quality of the movie is contained in the aftermath where suddenly the screen goes black and only the sound continues and we witness the following short dialog: "'Shit, we ran out of film.' Another says, 'Did you get it all?' 'Yeah, we got it. Let's get out of here.'"[203] At the end there are no film credits.[204]

Anti-porn feminists insist on the literal reading of this cinematographic dynamics and bolster this position especially with statements from real victims of the porn industry. As in the case of snuff movies, there is a precedent in this category that is repeatedly referred to in the discussion about the 'pros' and 'contras' of pornography. It is the case of Linda (Lovelace) Marchiano, the main actress of 'Deep Throat' (1972) which was the first porn movie shown in the USA in a 'normal' cinema theatre. In her autobiography *Ordeal*, Marchiano describes how her husband coerced her through psychological and physical force to be part of that movie, and how she was brutally battered by him in the night that followed the first day of shooting. For McKinnon this statement is paradigmatic for the whole porn industry and all its participants. "Almost everything that needs to be said about pornography can be said about Linda Marchiano, because everything people think about it, they think about her."[205] If one looks at *Ordeal* in more detail it becomes apparent that it is a mistake to hold pornography responsible for her suffering instead of her violent husband. Anne McClintock comments that

> (w)hat is important here is that while Marchiano became involved in porn only through Traynor's coercion, it was the making of *Deep Throat*, her fame and renewed confidence that finally empowered her to escape her abuser. (...) Such nuances are entirely lost in MacKinnon's wilfully one-dimensional account, and pornography *as a genre* is scapegoated for what was in actuality sustained *marital* battery.[206]

The most impressive example for the attempt of anti-porn feminists to establish a direct connection between the personal cases of women who were sexually abused and pornography

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of sexual diversity." (Rubin, "Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong." Bad Girls & Dirty Pictures. Edited by Assiter and Carol. 32.)

[203] Quoted in Linda Williams, *Hard Core*, 192.

[204] The scandal about the overwhelming sense of realness of this scene lead to an official investigation that resulted in the appearance of the 'murdered' script-girl at a press conference, where she explained that the ending of *Snuff* was nothing but an example of a common technique in cinema (a film within a film) that is used to increase the movie's appeal of authenticity.

[205] Quoted in McClintock, "Gonad and the Barbarian Venus Flytrap: Portraying the Female and the Male Orgasm." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 128.

as their allegedly responsible cause is the 1960 (sic) pages long *Meese Report on Pornography*. This investigation into the 'anti-social' and 'indecent' contents of pornography, commissioned by the Reagan administration, contains a broad overview and description of all (legally) obtainable pornographic material at that time. Furthermore it also comprises protocols of interviews with 'victims' of pornography. These interviews were conducted during public hearings ("Minneapolis Hearings") by a jury which was made up of a remarkable alliance of conservative, right-wing politicians, religious representatives, and anti-porn feminists (including Dworkin and McKinnon).[207] These interviews were meant to prove that women directly suffer the negative effects of pornography through the (sexual) violence from their pornography-consuming husbands or partners. All these cases are more or less variants of the fundamental dynamics of pornography which presumably encourages 'man' to perform misogynist and perverse sex acts on women. However, anti-censorship feminists attempt to demonstrate that the apparently self-evident assumption, that there is a direct and one-dimensional link between the contents of pornographic material and the concrete behaviour of its consumers, rests on three untenable premises. Firstly, there is the proposition that the content (the meaning) of pornographic material is completely understandable in terms of a literal reading of the images or texts. Secondly, that these contents are generally misogynist, sexist and violent. And thirdly, that the behaviour of men is governed in accordance with the simplistic behaviourist principle, that a specific stimulus causes a specific predictable reaction.

We will come back to the first point in connection with post feminist texts which scrutinise pornographic artefacts for their unconscious and metaphorical meanings. But first we have to ask whether pornography is indeed the preferred medium for the unhindered expression of misogyny in patriarchal society, and if so, whether this 'absolute ideology' really creates the effects that anti-porn feminists assume it does. Segal writes in this context that

> (w)hether it is from abused women or abused sex workers, however, what we hear when we do hear or read women's testimony against pornography or the pornography industry is stories of women coercively pressured into sex, or sexual display (...). But we should be more than foolish if we saw the harm we heard about as residing in the pornographic images themselves (...) and not in

[206] McClintock, "Gonad and the Barbarian Venus Flytrap: Portraying the Female and the Male Orgasm." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 129.
[207] See Brian McNair, *Mediated Sex. Pornography & Postmodern Culture*, 20.

> the men's (...) abuse of power. The harm, it is important to be clear about, is contained not in the explicitly sexual material, but in the social context (...)[208]

Furthermore it seems wrong to suppose that main-stream pornography would generally be more violent and sexist than any other artefact that expresses visual or textual fantasies. Sci-Fi, Hollywood-cinema, love-novels, fashion magazines, comics etc. convey the same gender stereotypes and clichés about the sexes. The only difference is that in pornography the performance of explicit sexuality is the 'stage' for these symptoms.

Although one must admit that, for a long time, pornography has exclusively been produced by men for men and therefore it is no surprise that most of the scenarios and narratives are indeed fuelled by male fantasies and desire. Post-feminists are very aware of this fact, yet emphasise that this is not an inherent characteristic of pornography in general but rather of that kind of material from whose production (as producers, directors, self-determined actresses) and consumption women have largely been excluded until very recently. Many post-feminists would agree that a large part of current main-stream pornography is sexist. In order to erase the sexist elements in mainstream pornography, however, a different approach needs to be made than merely calling for censorship. What is required according to some is not necessarily less pornography but more explicit material that is produced by women and which is tailored to meet the specific needs of female desire (fantasies). Thus, for some post-feminists the crucial question is: Why is pornography the main target of the (feminist) critique about the discrimination of women in patriarchy? Why is it that the depicted violence in some specific pornographic genres (e.g. S/M) needs to be condemned much stronger than violent acts in horror or 'slasher' movies, in war movies, detective stories etc.? So far feminists have not attempted to hold the producers responsible for films which depict ('normal') crimes committed against women.[209]

In her classic article "Pornography on/scene, or Diff'rent strokes for diff'rent folks" Linda Williams emphasises that under the current epistemic circumstances, it is impossible to ban pornography from the public because one of the main discourses of this episteme is (in Foucault's term) the scientia sexualis. This discourse tries to uncover the 'truth' of sexuality and comprises many different spheres of which pornography is only one part. In William's

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[208] Segal, "Does Pornography Cause Violence? The Search for Evidence." *Dirty Looks. Women - Pornography – Power*. Edited by Gibson and Gibson. 17.

[209] Laura Kipnis contests this logic with yet another example: "Maybe it becomes clearer how fantastical this argument is when you consider how eagerly we accept the premise that pornography causes violence (...) compared to the massive social disinclination to accept that handguns cause violence (and it's certainly far more provable that they do): Guns (...) don't seem to invite the same regulatory zeal, despite a completely demonstrable causal relation to violence." (Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*, p.175.)

view pornographic movies and photographs are first of all a regime of the visual knowledge about sexual desire.[210] According to Foucault's thesis that it is impossible to escape the dominant episteme through entering or inventing a 'meta-meta-discourse', every attempt to censor or ban pornography is merely another contribution to the all-inclusive 'scientia sexualis'. Interestingly, even the style of the anti-porn activist's discourse is affected in a way that runs contrary to their original intention. Williams concludes that

> (i)ndeed, the many accusations of obscenity and pornography - whether in anti-pornography books, in slide shows and films, in the Meese Commission's travelling public confessionals and later Final Report (1986) or in Senator Jesse Helms's finger pointing at National Endowment for the Arts-funded artists - can qualify as obscenity and pornography just as easily as the objects of their condemnation.[211]

If we look at Dworkin's books from this point of view it becomes obvious that in order to begin the analysis of the misogynist and violent behaviour that she wants to be banned, it has to be named, described and presented first, which is why many of her texts contain lengthy descriptions of the pornographic material in question. The important question now is: In what way is Dworkin's 'pornography' different from that which is the target of her critique?

It is, of course, the context which in the case of 'real' pornography should lead to sexual arousal whereas Dworkin's 'unreal' pornography is meant to provoke disgust and repulsion. Yet one could further ask, whether this would rather be an argument against Dworkin's own hypothesis that pornography per se always contains the same misogynist and sexist meanings irrespective of its context? Harriet Gilbert followed up this question in her analysis of Dworkin's novel *Mercy* whose overall structure is very similar to Marquis de Sades' *Justine* and Pauline Réages *The Story of O.* Yet, in the introduction and the afterword of the book she emphasises that the intention of this text is, of course, to deter and to make people aware of the suffering of women. Insofar it is true that this otherwise pornographic text (according to Dworkin's own definition) takes on a strong feminist agenda. Yet this is exactly the critical point at which Gilbert asks: "Is Mercy prevented from being pornographic by its author's polemical bookends?"[212] The meaning of a text or photograph is not only affected and

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[210] See Williams, "Pornography On/Scene." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 241.

[211] Williams, "Pornography On/Scene." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh.. 233.

[212] Harriet Gilbert, "So Long as It's not Sex and Violence." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 219 and 221.

Some could argue that pornography (intentionally degrading) is serving the same sexual purpose of Dworkin's novel viz. to deter people from the absurd or violent.

determined by its context but also by the subjective aesthetic beliefs and preferences of their recipients. For Gilbert

> (t)he truth is that this 'pornography', for which so many people are hunting, lives not in the *product* but beyond it, in the active relationship between product and reader. Paedophiles sometimes masturbate while looking through catalogues of children's clothes or watching the choirboys singing in 'Songs of Praise'.[213]

For post-feminists the whole debate about the 'objective' meaning of sexually explicit artefacts is linked to the age-old dispute about who should have the power to decide and define what is obscene and pornographic (in order to keep it away from the views of those who would suffer from its 'negative effects'.) Thus one has to ask: What is the reason that makes Dworkin and her allies immune to the 'absolute and totalitarian ideology' of the thousands of porn-magazines and movies on whose analyses their charges rest?[214] Why have the members of the Meese commission not succumbed to the negative effects of the vast porn-collection that is contained in their almost two thousand page report? Or asking in general: What could possibly be the reason that some 'privileged' individuals are un-affected by the causality that lies at the heart of anti-porn feminists' conviction in the behaviourism of pornography?

Laura Kipnis pursued this last question in a number of articles regarding the role of class-consciousness for the evaluation of pornography. It is obvious that in many respects the critique of pornography corresponds with the modernist divide between high and low culture, between art and trash, between original and mass-product, between sophisticated taste and (masturbatory) consumerism. From this perspective pornography is neither able to refine its users' taste nor to stimulate their intellect, but instead aims directly and unapologetically at the nether regions of the body.[215] In the words of anti-porn feminists it is about the difference between erotica (as an acceptable form of sexually explicit material) and pornography.

The assumption that pornography consumption inevitably leads to sexual violence corresponds with the traditional projection of members of the upper classes of unacceptable aspects of their own sexuality onto the lower classes, which they perceived of as being

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[213] Harriet Gilbert, "So Long as it's not Sex and Violence." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh., 223-4.

[214] In the last section of this chapter we are going to ask, if and to what extent fantasies express (political) ideology. It should become clear that the relation between fantasy and ideology is much more complicated than a literal translation or interpretation might suggest. Therefore, anti-porn feminists have to insist on their basic hypothesis that in the sphere of sexuality no ontological difference exists between fantasy and reality. The slogan that pornography is the theory and rape the reality can be upheld only under this premise. (See Segal "Sweet Sorrows, Painful Pleasures." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 71.)

dangerous, untamed and dirty. It is important though to notice that it is not necessarily the sexualisation that leads to inferiority (as anti-porn feminists suggest) but contrary, inferiority is the condition for the sexualisation of a situation. As Segal writes: "(T)he sexualitzation of 'inferior' bodies does become a sign of difference, and a measure of the superiority of those who disown and distance themselves from such bodies"[216]

In regard to the position of fundamentalist feminists in the anti-porn debate we find very similar conditions fulfilled. On the one hand there is the morally and intellectually superior feminist who is completely in control of her sexuality, and on the other hand there is the porn-consumer who lacks intelligence and the ability to reflect on his or her own behaviour, and therefore has no other choice than acting out the represented fantasies. In Kipnis' view

> (t)he pornography consumer is a walking projection of upper-class fears about lower-class men: brutish, animal-like, sexually voracious. And this fantasy is projected back onto pornography. In fact, arguments about the 'effects' of culture seem to be applied exclusively to lower cultural forms, that is to pornography, or cartoons, or subcultural forms like gangsta rap. This predisposition even extends to social science research: researchers aren't busy wiring Shakespeare viewers up to electrodes and measuring their penile tumescence or their galvanic skin responses to the violence or misogyny there.[217]

5.2 Reality under Laboratory Conditions

Before we start looking at post-feminists' psychoanalytical and deconstructive interpretations of pornographic material, I would like to briefly address the role of the 'scientific' literature which anti-porn feminists frequently quote to bolster their hypothesis that there is a direct link between the consumption of pornography and the instigation of violence. Whilst anti-porn feminists believe that the results of the vast empirical research on this subject yield unambiguous proof of their behaviourist stimulus-reaction theories, post-feminists and a large number of the sociologists and psychologists involved in the research agree that "inconsistency is the only consistency to emerge from empirical research which ignores both

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[215] See Linda Nead "Above the Pulp-Line: The Cultural Significance of Erotic Art." *Dirty Looks*. Edited by Gibson and Gibson. 145.

[216] Lynne Segal, "Sweet Sorrows, Painful Pleasures." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 73.

[217] Kipnis *Bound and Gagged*, 175-6.

the semiotic and the social context of images of sexual explicitness (...). Inconsistencies emerge between very similar studies and many interpretations of these have reached almost opposite conclusions."[218] The main difficulty of the 'scientific' inquiries about the link between pornography consumption and violence against women lies in the fact that, for ethical reasons, it is impossible to conduct 'field studies'. That means sociologists and psychologists are forced to reduce the complex real situations to a few parameters that they can simulate in laboratory conditions. One such standard tests is based on the following set-up: At the beginning of the test, a female member of the research team angers a test-subject (which for practical reasons are mostly students even though this is no proper demographic representation). Afterwards the test-subject is exposed to violent pornographic material (for example S/M practices). At the end of the test the test subject is asked to 'punish' the woman who angered him with electric shocks. The purpose of the test is to find a significant relationship between the intensity of the electric shock and the degree of the depicted violence in the pornographic material.

Another standard method to measure the variation of the aggression level is to ask the test person after he was exposed to pornographic material about the likelihood that he would perpetrate rape under the premise that he would not face any charges. A third method measures the blood circulation in the genitals and the skin conductivity of the hands during exposure to the pornographic material, in order to determine whether violent sexuality is more stimulating than explicit sexuality that does not have the violent element. For a fourth test type the gauge to measure the effects of pornography on its consumers is the so called 'rape-myth-acceptance'. This concept measures the test person's acceptance of the cliché that women want to be raped or at least forced into sex because there 'no' really means a 'yes'.

The basic problem of all of these tests lies in the obvious fact that, independent of their results, they can only very vaguely explain or even predict future events. The researcher McNair writes that "the social meaning of aggressivity when displayed in a sanctioned laboratory environment is very different from that of real aggression, directed at real people, with flesh and blood consequences."[219] And of course the same holds true for the degree of arousal and the fantasies which the pornographic material evokes. The extensive works of, for example, Nancy Friday, Shere Hite and Thelma McCormack have shown us that in both sexes, sexual arousal can be heightened through fantasies. These studies also show that even masochistic fantasies (e.g. rape-fantasies) can serve this purpose. Yet, to conclude that the

[218] Segal, "Does Pornography Cause Violence?" *Dirty Looks*. Edited by Gibson and Gibson. 15.
See also McNair, *Mediated Sex*, 71.
[219] McNair, *Mediated Sex*, 66.

people with these specific fantasies would also enjoy their real abuse or rape is, of course, absurd.

Segal strongly emphasises the importance of differentiating between fantasy and ideology. "For pornographic fantasy has no straightforward connection with what would be presumed to be its 'real-life' enactment, unless it is a stylized 'enactment' (as in consensual s/m) under the fantasizer's own control."[220] In some cases the test results suggested that watching sexually explicit and violent pornographic material leads to an increased level of aggression. Interestingly the same tests conducted as a long-time study had exactly the opposite results.

In general we could say that the large number of tests that have been conducted in this field allow us to conclude that it is impossible to make any definite assumptions about the connection between pornography and its effects in regard to the behaviour of its consumers. On the basis of these tests only, neither the positive nor the negative laboratory-results about the aggression level, the probability to commit rape, sexual stimulation and misogynist behaviour can be taken as predictions for real situations.[221] There are too many context-relevant factors which influence the possible effects of pornography on its users which can not be taken into account by the laboratory tests. This is just another confirmation of the fact that empirical tests can only measure what has a priori been determined to be test-worthy and accordingly guided the construction of the test procedure. Therefore one has to consider the test persons' possible reactions if their repertory of behaviour is not limited to either commit rape or not to rape, but if they are given a choice between an infinite set of alternatives which normal life always bears.

5.3 The Construction of Desire in the Pornographic Photograph

As we have seen in the course of this chapter, the main critique of post-feminists is the anti-porn-movement's literal and therefore reductionistic understanding of pornographic artefacts. Insisting on one of the many possible ways of interpreting them is a necessary premise for their call for censorship and banning of pornography. In accordance with Spivak's slogan "Use it, don't accuse it"[222], post-feminists attempt to break down the sexist elements in pornography with the help of psychoanalytical and deconstructive tools. Instead of following

[220] Segal, "Sweet Sorrows, Painful Pleasures." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 71.

[221] The ambiguity of the results of these tests may also simply point to the inappropriateness of the test as a valid means of measuring.

[222] Spivak, quoted in Berkeley Kaite, *Pornography and Difference*, xi.

the apparently stringent anthropological premises of the pornographic discourse which fuels the repetitive sexual scenarios, it is necessary to uncover the subtle anxieties, frustrations, instabilities and subversions that are inherent to that very same discourse of photographs, films and texts. The call for censorship and banning unwittingly accepts the presupposition that pornography truly captures and represents the traditional repertory of male sexuality and desire, and furthermore that it has the adequate means to satisfy this desire. Therefore I would now like to consider some alternatives to the interpretations which support these presumptions.

Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and also Foucault's genealogical work suggest that we understand the phenomena of human sexuality not as mere 'self-sufficient' biological processes but as a network of culturally acquired behaviour that is discoursively mediated and fuelled by largely unconscious drives and wishes, including what is commonly labelled sexual desire. Elisabeth Cowie suggests that "(se)xual arousal is a matter not of nature, but of signification. What arouses is already a highly coded entity. Sexual arousal is not merely a bodily affair but first and foremost a psychical relation."[223] And these psychological relations are mostly taking place in the realm of fantasy and not, as anti-porn feminists assume, in the real. For this reason literal readings of pornographic artefacts make the mistake of identifying sexual desire in the depicted anatomical bodies. Pornography is never just a documentation of the 'action' among the models, but instead is a 'mise en scène' that must leave space for the desire of the viewer. Otherwise it would not be possible to understand why pornography could be *sexually stimulating* at all. The directedness or intentionality of the pornographic photograph asks us to focus on the interpretation of the position of its addressee and not on the depicted content. In Kaite's words, one could thus ask: "Who does this photo think you are?"[224] This approach implies that one of the most effective ways of criticising sexist pornography is to reveal oneself as a different addressee who is not reachable (seducible) by the specific photograph.[225] In analogy to the common saying about the origin of art, one could formulate that pornography too comes into existence 'in the eye of the beholder'.

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[223] Elisabeht Cowie: "Pornography and Fantasy: Psychoanalytic Perspectives." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 135.

[224] Kaite, *Pornography and Difference*, xi.

[225] It is exactly this mechanism in progress that is noticeable in the last ten years of feminist porn-production, viz. a kind of pornography which is not only fuelled by heterosexual male desire but that leaves space for female fantasies as well. When pornography is reproached for being vulgar, disgusting, tasteless, sexist etc. one implicitly admits that it is able to produce strong (negative) effects, which is indeed one of the main purposes of some pornographic genre. In Kipnis' view, Larry Flint's notorious *Hustler* magazine is one such example, where pornography is the vehicle and medium for the transgression of almost every imaginable social norm, class-barrier and standard of taste. (See Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*, 122-160.)

I think we need to further elaborate the post-structuralist hypothesis, that the pornographic photograph does not depict a purely biological act but attempts instead to stage-manage sexual desire in order to arouse the porn consumer's scopophilic drive. One of the basic characteristics of sexual desire lies in the fact that it is not attached to a particular object but instead represents the absence of the desired object. The possibility of filling that void or absence (which is to completely satisfy desire) exists only in fantasy.

According to psychoanalytical theory, one of the young child's first 'lost' objects is the mother's breast, because it is the origin of the first experience of something being different from him or her.[226] The satisfaction that the breast provides is periodical and can not be initiated by the baby alone. Thus the origin of desire is instigated by a kind of satisfaction which is superimposed onto the one that is immediately attached to the biological necessity of ingesting food. In this case it is the baby's pleasure to suckle on the breast, a pleasure which is different from the gratification that accompanies a full stomach. At this moment the breast becomes a sign, a signifier, which stands for (represents) something else. Cowie writes that

> (t)he feeding still nourishes the child, but the experience of satisfaction in feeding has been split off through the function of representation - the breast stands for a possible satisfaction - and thus moves into the field of fantasy, and by this very fact starts existing as sexuality. (...) As a result sexuality is characterized as a desire for pleasure, rather than simply the satisfaction of biological sex.[227]

In this context the most important characteristic of sexual desire is its origin in a formerly experienced satisfaction (gratification, pleasure), whose absence is represented by a specific object. An object though which is not the source of the desire but a substitute for the 'lost' object (the experience of pleasure). In this sense one can conclude that desire is partly situated in the realm of fantasy, because it is always aroused through the imagination of an absent and thus unreal satisfaction.[228]

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[226] Although this is not the place to discuss the concept of the lost object in detail, I believe it is important to emphasise that the traditional psychoanalytical understanding needs to be revised by considering pre-natal states that might already show signs of a *dyadic* structure that is later called the subject-object relation. In his recent book *Sphären I: Blasen.* Peter Sloterdijk developed a fascinating ontology of the unborn, which suggests that there are a number of earlier 'things' (in his terms 'nobjects') that have the paradoxical character of being at the same time one with the foetus and also different from it. It might be helpful to understand the 'lost' object breast in a similar way since the baby's 'call' for it is a strong indication for the fact that the breast continues to exist in the baby's voice even though in reality it is absent. (See Sloterdijk: *Sphären I: Blasen*, especially chapters 4, 4.2, and 7 Exkurs 8.)

[227] Cowie, "Pornograhy and Fantasy." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 135-6.

[228] For an interesting discussion of the relationship between desire and fantasy see Todd McGowan, "Finding Ourselves on a Lost Highway: David Lynch's Lesson in Fantasy." *Cinema Journal* 39, Winter 2000, 51-73. For McGowan desire is always part of the real whereas every attempt to satisfy it belongs to the imaginary. I am not

In conclusion we could say that the pornographic discourse (photograph, film) is not an objective documentation of a purely biological act, but has to be understood as the imaginary stage-managing of the various forms of sexual desire. "We may say that the pornographic photograph is a 'published dream'. (...) (I)t has the structure of a dream sequence. It is a dream which appears, like myths, symbols, rituals, and other artefacts, to be an anonymous utterance."[229] One of the basic conditions for the pornographic photograph to properly function is that it leaves space for the desire of the viewer in its dynamic centre. It is his (or her) own desire that closes the incomplete exchange of signifiers of the models' desire which circulates around the 'lost object'. That is the reason why the pornographic discourse never comes to an end, because the object of desire (in whatever form it is represented) remains unreachable. Pornography, therefore faces the following intrinsic paradox: It relies on showing the concrete, real bodies and their copulations to make sexual desire visible, even though sexual desire as such can not be represented. This also explains why pornography is constantly forced to equip the depicted bodies - which are obviously marked by a number of 'flaws' – with all kinds of fetishistic objects in order to cover up the imperfections and lacks.

According to Lacan the 'original lack' on which the symbolic order of patriarchal society rests, consists of the 'lack' of the phallus, the first signifier which marks the entrance to 'the law of the father'. For as long as the undisturbed connection between mother and child still exists, the mother is in 'possession' of the phallus. For the child, world and mother are one, and it is part of that by being 'everything' for the mother. Yet the moment the child starts to realise that the desire of his or her mother has got other objects as well (e.g. the father, another child) the meaning of the phallus (as absence, as a lack) begins to become effective. The ambiguous desire of the mother is also a sign for the fact that she is not endowed with absolute power. In order to obtain power and independence, it is necessary for the child to subject to the law, or in Lacanian terms, to accept the threat of symbolic castration. Acknowledging the differences between the sexes is one important element of that process.

Keeping this short excursion into psychoanalytical theory in mind, we should now be able to explain why a large part of mainstream pornography, that aims at the male heterosexual viewer or reader is controlled by the search for the phallus, and that one way of responding to the futility of this search is through denial of the fact that the phallus implicitly represents a lack. In the same way as it is of great importance for the heterosexual fetishist that the phallic

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convinced though, that it makes sense to strictly separate the two phenomena since both seem to have realistic and imaginary qualities.

[229] Kaite, *Pornography and Difference*, viii.

Like any dream, we might add, the pornographic photo too is an egotistical production.

object is attached to a body which symbolises 'otherness' (e.g. the difference between the sexes), the pornographic discourse also glides along the narrow ridge of 'otherness' and 'sameness'. Thus 'woman' as 'other' is also constructed as 'sameness' by way of attaching fetishistic objects to her body. In this sense one could conclude that pornography - even though it might sound paradoxical - avoids genital (which is the psychoanalytical understanding of normal) sexuality, despite the great surplus of close up shots of copulating genitals. The sexually stimulating moment is not primarily caused by the depiction (documentation) of genital sexuality (which would be the sphere of sex education) but through the accompanying desire that is situated in pre-genital fantasies, including the fetishistic denial of the difference between the sexes. Whilst 'otherness' always implies the fear of castration, encountering total 'sameness' would cause desire to collapse, because sexual desire is necessarily the desire for an 'Other'.

Interestingly, the heterosexual pornographic discourse constructs this 'Other' as an object with phallic qualities, thus as a hybrid of otherness and sameness. For Kaite it is this oscillation between difference and in-difference which is the seductive element in pornographic photographs and films. "The pornographic model (...) carries the signs of his phallic masculinity: it is this play of differences, this erotic theft, and the indifference to difference involved, that seduces."[230] And the same is true for all non-heterosexual pornographic discourses. In pornography which aims at male homosexuals, one of the models is always marked as 'Other' through 'female' attributes. Male (phallic) desire is then grafted onto this constructed difference. This also sheds light on the critique of feminists who attempt to abolish all (power-) differences in sexual relationships and for whom homosexuality represents the possibility to live this ideal equality. However, the problem remains that sexual desire without elements of difference must collapse. Furthermore one could ask whether the wish for unity, sameness, non-difference is itself an expression of phallic desire. ("Phallic desire is singular, exclusive, and competitive."[231])

It is necessary to consider, for a moment, a possible objection to this supposedly uncritical use of psychoanalytical concepts, whose implicit sexist tendencies we exposed in the previous chapter. Despite the 'artificiality' of these concepts it is important to acknowledge that they are expressions of real (factual) conditions. The fact that they represent a strongly biased perspective is no sufficient reason to dismiss them once and for all. The goal should be to make psychoanalysis aware of its sexist frame of reference through the use of its theoretical tools. From this self-deconstructive point of view it is also possible to conduct a

[230] Kaite, *Pornography and Difference*, 29.

psychoanalytically inspired interpretation (analysis) of pornography. In fact, exposing the silent agreement between pornography and psychoanalysis regarding some basic phallic myths presents a viable starting point for the critique of pornography. "It is the responsibility of the ensuing analysis to render visual images, photographs, into linguistic terms. The attempt is not description or oppositional analysis, but a deconstructive analysis which confronts the image on its own terms, from within."[232] For example, the pornographic close up shot of female genitalia ensures the male viewer of his own intactness because of the obvious 'castratedness' of the female model. Yet, the analysis of the other partial-objects and fetishistic objects, depicted elsewhere in the image or the photographic series show us that this discourse is generally ambivalent and always bears the danger, that the viewer-voyeur is robbed of some of his own phallic privileges.

Kaite's systematic analysis of pornographic photographs is mainly informed by psychoanalytical theory and Derrida's deconstructive etymology. She attempts to uncover the non-visible, suppressed, forgotten and repressed meanings of the depicted objects and body-parts by tracing their etymological roots.[233] At the end of the often long chains of associations between words we encounter terms that have exactly the opposite meaning of the initial words. Thus Kaite shows us that pornography's significant partial-objects of the female breast, the gaze of the female model, the high-heel (stiletto-) shoe, the anus, jewellery and lingerie are not only conventional signs for femininity but also always posses male connotations. In regard to the gaze she writes:

> (T)he eye is also an agent of illumination, providing light, an orifice of projection. 'To cast an eye on, lay an eye on,' 'to have eyes for,' 'to look into something': the eyes are active agents of capture, possession, penetration. They do not just receive but they project, and they do this through the light they shed. In short, the eye is figuratively feminine and masculine. (...) What makes the moment pornographic is this partial masculinization of the ocular orifice, an orifice which begins as ambisexual; i.e., it can receive as well as emit. As part of the pornographic maneuver, the eye is aggressive, acquisitive, possessive: it invades the space of the reader, implicating him not only in the activity of looking but also as the one who is looked at.[234]

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[231] Kaite, *Pornography and Difference*, 28.
[232] Kaite, *Pornography and Difference*, 18.
[233] One of the main references she uses is Eric Partridge's *The dictionary of Historical Slang*.
[234] Kaite, *Pornography and Difference*, 72 and 79.

Bearing this in mind it is also possible to refute the common critique (which is not only a position of anti-porn feminists) that the relation between the porn consumer and the depicted models is strictly a subject-object relation, that mirrors the difference between the sexes. Contrary to the 'surface-messages' of pornography, the scenarios are always at the fringe of their own subversion and deconstruction. Maleness becomes femaleness and vice versa, activity changes to passivity, heterosexual desire is constantly threatened by the possibility to turn into homosexuality, and the apparently unlimited sexual drive that propels the pornographic discourse (represented through the endless repetition of the sex acts) is always at risk of dwindling because of boredom, disgust, exhaustion etc.

Another concept which is very useful for exposing the aforementioned instabilities and ambiguities in the pornographic code, needs to be mentioned. It is another important psychoanalytical concept, viz. the fantasised occupation of the position of an other called identification. Interestingly anti-porn feminists are unable to dismiss this concept despite the fact that they reject the characterisation of pornography as fantasy. In their opinion identification is always strictly aligned with an individual's specific gender role (men identify with other men and women only with other women.) Yet in psychoanalysis, identifications are completely transcendent which means that it is possible to identify with individuals of both sexes in infinite ways. In Cowie's understanding "a man may identify with the woman's pose of self-display in so far as it signifies the wish to be found loveable in one's sex, an identification with a passive wish, rather than an identification with the woman and her body as female."[235]

In chapter seven, where we are also going to look at the work of feminist photographers, it should become clear that there are alternatives to the dominant 'phallic narratives' of the pornographic discourse, whose seductive moments do not require us to assign the desired 'other' with phallic attributes. This though, is one of the main mechanisms in heterosexual mass-pornography which constantly seeks to tame the otherness of the female position through investing it with an omnipresent sameness.[236]

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[235] Cowie, "Pornography and Phantasy." *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate.* Edited by Segal and McIntosh. 141.

[236] For a detailed account of the connection between pornography, politics and fascism see Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies.*

Part III

Chapter 6

From Structural Analysis to Phenomenological Self-Reflection: Roland Barthes' Annotations on Photography

This chapter on Barthes marks a turning point in the thesis where the theoretical and the performance begin to coincide for the first time in relation to photography (except for the explication of Derrida's 'lecture'). Barthes is a writer performing on the theme of visuality and photography who deliberately undermines the custom of keeping theory and practise, objectivity and subjectivity, 'intellectual taste' and intuitive judgements apart. This makes him a connecting link between the formerly discussed writers and the works of the photographers that we are going to explore in the last part of this study.

Like these photographers, Barthes also performs on the related themes of visuality, photography and culture. The concept 'culture' is indeed of central importance, because for him it marks that point where the transgression of traditional norms and values becomes possible. Barthes' usage of language, of theory, of other authors' writings prepares us for the prevailing aesthetic attitudes in postmodern art-photography because there too, breaking down the barriers between specific genre, styles, concepts, techniques etc. is the preferred way of establishing a photographic counter-culture.

The first five chapters had the purpose of 'gathering' the theoretical context of the main themes that art-photography today is concerned with. In Barthes we have a writer, who uses these texts as inspiration for a highly informed, yet playful draft of an ontology of photography.[237] This explains why he is the last one of the theoreticians of consciousness and language that I want to discuss before moving on to the works of contemporary photographic performers. With Barthes' 'ontology of photography' we are in a position that will enable us to understand and appreciate the 'pleasure of the ambiguous gaze' that is the vanishing point in the images of these photographers.

[237] To be more precise, we should call it a 'phenomenological ontology', because it is strongly influenced by – inter alia - Sartre's phenomenological enquiry about mental imagery *L'Imaginaire*. (See Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Criticism. Criticism and Postmodernity*, 79-80.)

Of all authors discussed so far Barthes takes up a pivotal position because he has written about visuality in general and photography in particular in more detail than his fellow post-structuralists. It is interesting to notice that the tenor of each article and essay on photography (visuality) is strongly influenced by the specific 'scientific' phase that Barthes was going through when he wrote them. Even though he always tried to avoid any strict categorisations of his works, it became common custom to divide them in three phases: structuralism, semiology, and text-theory.[238] The last phase includes his famous book on photography *Camera Lucida* which is also his last published book before his untimely death. *Camera Lucida* (subtitled *Reflections on photography*) has been criticised by some art historians and historians of photography because it is not a strict 'scientific' (philosophical, sociological, aesthetical or art-historical) treatise.[239]

Interestingly this critique confirms Barthes' intention (attempt) to withstand the pressure to adhere to traditional scientific constraints and procedures. At the beginning of *Camera Lucida* he says:

> What did I care about the rules of composition of the photographic landscape, or, at the other end, about the Photograph as family rite? Each time I would read something about Photography, I would think of some photograph I loved, and this made me furious. Myself, I saw only the referent, the desired object, the beloved body; but an importunate voice (the voice of knowledge, of *scientia*) then adjured me, in a severe tone: 'Get back to Photography. What you are seeing here and what makes you suffer belongs to the category 'Amateur Photographs', dealt with by a team of sociologists; (...) Yet I persisted; another, louder voice urged me to dismiss such sociological commentary; looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be a primitive, without culture.'[240]

In my view *Camera Lucida* is a very important and fascinating essay which shows us that a scientific 'theory of photography' might not exist. Although *Camera Lucida* is not only concerned with photography, it is a text that, more than any sociological or historical study,

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[238] Barthes' does not deny that his writings weren't marked by significant changes and 'breaks'. What he criticises is the idea that the classification of his texts would produce a surplus of meaning and make them more understandable. In a slightly polemic tone he writes that "(t)he articulation of a period, of a work, into phases of development - though this be a matter of an imaginary operation - permits entering the interaction of intellectual communication: one makes oneself *intelligible.*" (Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 145.) Interestingly, Barthes adds a forth phase which he calls 'morality'. Apart from *The Pleasure of the Text* and *Roland Barthes* it seems likely that he would also have included into this phase *A Lover's Discourse* and his last book *Camera Lucida.*

[239] For an overview of the reactions on *Camera Lucida* see Nancy Shawcross, *The Intertexts of "La Chambre Claire": Barthes, the Photograph, and the Interstice of Time*, 3-31

[240] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 7.

stimulates the reader's thoughts and emotions about the subject photography without interfering with his or her individual preferences for specific photographs and photographic genre. The reason why *Camera Lucida* is not a coherent 'theory on photography' lies partly in the fact that it contains a second important theme, viz. the mourning of the recent death of Barthes' mother. Even though it is a conglomerate of a large number of ideas which he has written about in other contexts it would be wrong to understand *Camera Lucida* as progressive improvement of these ideas. In Barthesian manner one has to understand it as yet another attempt (variation) to expose the recurring paradoxes and insufficiencies of the various sign-systems (media) that humans use to communicate with one another.[241]

Roland Barthes is yet another representative of French poststructuralism whose texts are difficult to classify and to represent as a compact theory. The reason for this is not only the thematic diversity and the overwhelming number of books, essays, articles and interviews (spanning a period of four decades), there is something in his texts which resists unity, closure, theoretical usability and sometimes even readability. We are again faced with the problem with what (didactical) goal and in what rhetorical style to explain and interpret Barthes' texts so as to do justice to their heterogeneity and subversiveness.

In a certain way this is a problem that has been a frequently recurring theme in Barthes' own writings. It is about the position of the author who either writes as scientist (critic, philosopher), as artist (producer of prose and lyrics) or as essayist (for newspapers and magazines).[242] One of the remarkable qualities of Barthes' oeuvre is that he was able to take up all these positions, viz. not only at different times in different projects, but often in one and the same text. One could assert that this kind of writing characterises especially his post-structuralist phase, which began with *S/Z* (1970) and ended with *Camera Obscura* (1980).

The ambiguity and contradictory nature of his style can be understood in terms of a theoretical position that Barthes elaborated in an article from 1968 with the title: 'The death of the author'. In that text he attempts to deconstruct the formal relationship between author and text, which rests on the idea that the author represents the past of his work, which means that he or she exists as an independent subject who invests the text with meaning, sense and

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Barthes refers here to the famous sociological study of Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle Brow Art.*

[241] This is a characteristic feature not only of *Camera Lucida* but of most of his other texts as well. They deal with a number of recurring themes, always giving them a different name and putting them in a different context which slightly changes their meaning. The author, the text, the myth, the Haiku in Zen, the play of signifiers, reading/writing, the body, the structure of language, Marxism and psychoanalysis, photography, morality, the mask, the Argo etc. are themes and concepts which often feature in Barthes' texts without ever receiving a final definition. Instead, Barthes tries to mirror their fundamental ambiguity and in-determinability through his fragmentary and aphoristic style.

[242] Another essential characteristic of the author in the traditional sense is the strict differentiation between author and reader. The attempt to overcome this division is another important theme in Barthes' texts.

intentionality.[243] In contrast, for Barthes (author-) subject and text are inseparably intertwined. "(T)he modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now."[244] We are thus asked to abandon the aforementioned classification of the author-subject as scientist, artist, essayist etc. in order to avoid the exclusions and limitations that are a necessary part of it. Instead author and text need to be situated in a non-hierarchical and non-causal (simultaneous) relationship. Accordingly one and the same text could be read as a philosophical, artistic, historical and autobiographical writing.

We saw that in the sphere of linguistic signs that meaning originates through differences between the signifying elements. In Barthes' view the same holds true for the whole text or work, because it takes on meaning through its references and allusions to other texts.[245]

> We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (...) (T)he writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.[246]

This understanding of the text as genuinely interrelated to other texts is not only a central and frequently discussed theme in Barthes' writings, but it also became an important performative aspect of his writing-style, viz. in the mode of the fragment and the aphorism.

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[243] See Barthes "The Death of the Author." *Image, Music, Tex.* 145.

[244] See Barthes "The Death of the Author." *Image, Music, Tex.* 145.

[245] In the article "From work to text" Barthes clearly differentiates between these two terms. Whereas the 'work' is static and closed and has a determinable meaning (story, ideology, narrative) the term text implies the 'free play of signifiers' which leads to unlimited metonymical associations. For Barthes "(t)he difference is this: the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field. (...) (T)he work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse. (...) *(T)he Text is experienced only in an activity of production.*" (Barthes, "From Work to Text." *Image, Music, Text.* 156-7.)

One could further say, that it is always possible to assign an author to the work, whereas the text is - in Barthes' words - fatherless, which means that it enters the scene without the author's intentions. Because the production of text also includes the reader, one could paradoxically say that the text has not only one author but as many as there are potential readers. This point is important because it demonstrates that Barthes' differentiation between work and text is not strictly exclusive, they do not exist separately from each other. Depending on the context one of the terms might be more prominent than the other. "In particular, the tendency must be avoided to say the work is classic, the text avant-garde; it is not a question of drawing up a crude honours list in the name of modernity and declaring certain literary productions 'in' and others 'out' by virtue of their chronological situation: there may be 'text' in a very ancient work, while many products of contemporary literature are in no way texts." (Barthes, "From Work to Text." *Image, Music, Text.* 156.)

[246] Barthes, "From Work to Text." *Image, Music, Text.* 146.

What alternatives are available that could enable us to avoid both the 'scientific explication' of Barthes' work (literary criticism) as well as the plagiary imitation of his fragmentary style, which is not able to overcome the authority of the author Barthes either? Michael Moriarty offers an interesting and helpful directive by arguing that Barthes' own concept of 'intertextuality' also allows readings (interpretations) which are situated in the sphere of the '*studium*', 'culture' or the 'readable'.[247] As long as we are aware of the fact that these different readings are only provisional approaches, which interpret the texts to a certain degree without re-writing them. For Barthes though this is a necessary precondition allowing us to unfold the potentially unlimited facets and meanings of a text.

If one would interpret Barthes from the perspective of 'the author' or 'the work', one could say that he has worked through specific themes, that he has learned from mistakes and that during the course of his career he came closer to the truth of the subjects of his writing and that he found his own, authentic and true style. This view though, goes against Barthes' own conviction that it is impossible to strictly categorise his work which is also visible in the structure of his texts. Instead of clearly differentiating between opposite theoretical positions, Barthes tries to find a provisional solution, a third thing, a synthesis which does not resolve the antagonism but leaves it intact. (Barthes states that there is nothing 'Hegelian' or dialectical in his texts).[248]

If this 'logic' is applied to the obvious changes and breaks in his writings, one can understand that it does not make sense to declare his earlier texts as outdated and obsolete, because they are valuable occasions for the ongoing project of changing one's writing in order to avoid what Barthes calls 'the hardening of language' (which is happening in ideologies, principles, logics, truths). Every text must remain open for its deconstruction and critical appraisal. Regarding his autobiographical writings, Barthes says:

> Open (and how could they be otherwise?) to these different futures, my texts are disjointed, no one of them caps any other; the latter is nothing but a *further* text, the last of the series, not the ultimate in meaning: *text upon text*, which never illuminates anything. What right does my present have to speak of my past? Has my present some advantage over my past? What 'grace' might have enlightened me? Except that of passing time, or of a good cause, encountered on my way?[249]

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[247] See Moriarty, *Roland Barthes*, 1-3.
[248] See the fragment "Dialectics." Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 68-9.
[249] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 120-1.

Instead of assuming that Barthes could lead us to 'the truth' of photography (prepared through the previous chapters) I suggest that we read him an a way in which he would – for example - 'absorb' Marcel Proust. Barthes speaks of him not as an authority or as a moralistic, epistemological or artistic benchmark, but as a frame of reference, as a 'general Mathesis', as a "*mandala* of the entire literary cosmogony."[250] In this frame of reference nothing is forced, it just happens, often unconsciously and in unexpected situations or moments. Barthes: "(T)his does not mean that I am in any way a Proust 'specialist': Proust is what comes to me, not what I summon up; not an 'authority,' simply a circular memory. Which is what the intertext is: the impossibility of living outside the infinite text."[251] One can add that not all texts of the same author bear the stimulation and potential of this 'circular memory', although this is compensated for by the fact that the texts which have the quality of an inter-text can surface in unlimited contexts.[252]

The work (book) as a whole has no surplus meaning that exceeds its single fragments and components and the same is true for photography, viz. also on the macro-level and on the micro-level.[253] Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida*:

> I realized that I have never liked all the pictures by any one photographer: the only thing by Stieglitz that delights me (but to ecstasy) is his most famous image (...); a certain picture by Mapplethorpe led me to think I had found 'my' photographer; but I hadn't - I don't like all of Mapplethorpe. Hence I could not accede to that notion which is so convenient when we want to talk history, culture, aesthetics - that notion known as an artist's style.[254]

In an article about the homosexual photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden, Barthes shows us that disregarding the traditional interpretative concepts style, genre and the historical period leads not only to an alternative understanding of von Gloeden's work, but furthermore enables the viewer to find a fresh interest and pleasure in these strangely antiquated and kitschy images.[255] These photographs become interesting again because they feature the then prevailing art-historical and aesthetical principles with an incredible naivety and without concern for their

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[250] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 36.
[251] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 36.
[252] In Barthes' view the same dynamics is at work in the act of reading, which ideally becomes a kind of 'new writing' of the 'original' text.
[253] We are going to return to this point because it is not only a good example of how the duplication of reading-styles leads to a 'liberation' of sense, and it also clarifies Barthes' differentiation between a consuming, and therefore conservative reading of a text and its 'new writing' through a productive reading.
[254] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 17-8.
[255] Barthes, "Wilhelm von Gloeden." *Der Entgegenkommende und der Stumpfe Sinn*, 204-206.

incompatibility. In reminiscence to his semiological and structuralist terminology Barthes calls the resulting contradictions "heterologies, frictions of different, opposing languages."[256]

6.1 The Semiological (Mis-) Adventure

The main purpose of this section is to situate Barthes' *Camera Lucida* in context with the texts of his last 'phase' (text-theory or post-structuralism).[257] These texts clearly mark the abolition of his attempts to analyse some of the more significant sign-systems of our culture with the 'meta-languages' (scientific languages) structuralism and semiology, of which he was one of the 'co-founders'. The most consequent and elaborate attempt of Barthes to apply the structuralist terminology (developed in his *Elements of Semiology*) is his text from 1967 *The Fashion System*, which was originally conceived as his doctoral thesis. It is an endeavour into the structures of the texts that are a necessary element of the fashion-industry, e.g. as advertising text, as essay in fashion magazines or as 'subtitle' of photographs. Despite the meticulousness and the highly abstract language of this inquiry, he did not succeed in achieving the scientific pureness and general validity that he aimed for because of general methodological problems that his systematic and classificatory text was unable to overcome. Unfortunately, Barthes' inquiry which he perceived of as a 'meta-language', consists of the same linguistic units as that language which is the object of that inquiry. He is of course aware of this fact which is why he needs to assume different levels on which the specific languages operate.

In regard to the 'fashion-language' we find the following layering of languages: On the first level is the garment in its pure functional meaning. Barthes calls this level the 'real code', the 'real garment' or the 'real world'. One level up there is the purely denotative (descriptive) linguistic expression of this reality, which he also calls 'the written code' (the sentence, the proposition). Above this second level we find the actual expression of fashion, which adds another meaning to the purely denotative sentence and which consists of the fact that the relation between the 'real code' and the 'written code' represent fashion (are the sign of

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[256] Barthes, "Wilhelm von Gloeden." *Der Entgegenkommende und der Stumpfe Sinn*, 204. [My translation]

[257] This includes the following books published between 1970 and 1980: *S/Z* (1970), *Empire of Signs* (1970), *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), *Roland Barthes* (1975), *A Lover's Discourse* (1977) and *Camera Lucida* (1980).
As I have mentioned before we will focus on those texts of Barthes that are either directly concerned with photography or which in one way or the other relate to them. It should also be clear that the selection of texts I intend to discuss is partially led by my own personal interests and predilections. According to Barthes I could reformulate: I don't like all of his writings and not all of them qualify as my personal intertexts.

fashion). For an example-analysis Barthes uses the sentence 'Prints win at the races'. He writes that

> (f)irst of all, it is certain that the equivalence between prints and races, between garment and the world, is given (written) only insofar as it indicates (signifies) Fashion; in other words, wearing prints at the races becomes in its turn the signifier of a new signified: Fashion; but since this signified is only actualized insofar as the equivalence between the world and the garment is written, it is the notation of this equivalence itself which becomes the signifier of system 3, whose signified is fashion.[258]

On top of these three levels there is a forth one which Barthes labels the 'rhetorical system', and which adds to the denotative message of level 3 ('prints at the races' = fashion) another connotative meaning, viz. through the typical phrases that express a certain 'world-view'. The principle behind this layering of languages could be formulated in the following way: Signifier and signified of the 'real code' together constitute a sign which on the level of the 'written code' becomes the signified of the signifier on the next level up. During the transition from level 3 to 4 this dynamics is reversed. In this case the sign (signifier + signified) becomes the signifier of the next levels up.[259] This change in the function of the sign on the different language levels (signifier/signified) depends on whether the next level up is a 'meta-language' or a 'connotative' language.

Instead of further going into the details of this text it is more important to consider the status or language level of Barthes' own text? In the section titled "The corpus" Barthes writes that his inquiry is based on the analysis of the complete issue of some fashion magazines from the years 1958/59. In this sense one could say that the sentences which he ascribed to the level 4 (rhetorical system) become the signifieds of his own 'meta-language'. Following his own systematic (logic) one would then have to ask for the rhetorical system of this meta-language, for which the denotations (terminological system) become the signifiers of the 'representations of world'. In other words: Why should this process where 'the real', or the sentences denoting 'the real' become the object of another meta-language come to a halt at Barthes' own inquiry?[260]

Despite all its flaws I believe it would be wrong to call 'The fashion system' outdated, a general mistake or a futile exercise in the application of a sterile linguistic system, because it

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[258] Barthes, *The Fashion System*, 35.

[259] For a schematic presentation of this dynamics see Barthes, *The Fashion System*, 37.

[260] This excursus into Barthes' structuralist terminology is important for us especially in regard to his earlier articles on photography, because the differentiation between the denotative and the connotative meaning of sign-systems plays a different role in photography than, for example, in language.

still is a 'coherent' theory (coherent within a limited frame of reference) which tries to expose the subtle dynamics of the then prevailing aesthetical and economical values. In his earlier 'mythological' work where he examined some of our everyday myths, he tried to analyse the basic mechanisms of a number of sign systems and how they produce meaning.[261] Moriarty concludes that

> "(t)he deeper understanding of our own cultural processes is simultaneously a deeper understanding of the specifically human property of making things meaningful. The task of Barthes' structuralist period is to describe the human reign of the intelligible; the structuralist listens to culture, and what he hears is not specific meanings, but the hum of an immense machine through which humanity incessantly produces meaning.[262]

Thus the scientific accuracy and logical pureness which Barthes tried to establish were part of a larger project, i.e. to construct a general matrix for the understanding of all sign systems that produce meaning and sense. Such a general semiology, based in linguistics, would represent a universal tool to hypothetically understand all communication-processes (as Chomsky tried to do). It would enable us to uncover the hidden power-interests especially in communication processes which are understood to be natural and a-historical. Despite the 'enlightening' directive of Barthes' endeavour, its inefficiency is so obvious because of the many a posteriori premises without which it would not explain anything. Most problematic in this context is his assumption that the differentiation between reality, object-language and meta-language, is an a priori and extra-linguistic fact.

Barthes abandoned his 'structuralist project' after he realised that its inherent critical potential had failed, because he was operating within the same structural order of binary oppositions (of the myths) which he tried to expose and deconstruct. One very obvious example for this is his frequent critique of the universality of bourgeois mass-culture (including fashion). In his structuralist analyses Barthes tried to subject mass-culture's suggestive power which he called 'doxa' to the critique of his own 'para-doxa'. Because this would leave the principle of universality as such un-criticised, it is no over-interpretation to say that in the end Barthes' structuralism generated its own myth and doxa.

At the beginning of the seventies Barthes became increasingly aware of these difficulties and began to search for alternatives in order to deconstruct the systematic as organising principle instead of criticising 'the system' in a systematic manner. (Barthes' term for 'deconstruct' is to 'decompose').

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[261] See for example *Mythologies* and *The Eiffel Tower*.

> Suppose that the intellectual's (or the writer's) historical function, today, is to maintain and to emphasize the *decomposition* of bourgeois consciousness. Then the image must retain all its precision: this means that we deliberately pretend to remain within this consciousness and that we will proceed to dismantle it, to weaken it, to break it down on the spot, as we would do with a lump of sugar by steeping it in water. Hence *decomposition* is here contrary to *destruction*: (...) to *destroy* would ultimately come to no more than reconstituting a site of speech whose one characteristic would be exteriority: exterior and motionless: in other words, dogmatic language.[263]

It would be wrong though to understand this turn in Barthes' thinking as an absolute break because it is an expression of his awareness that basically every text carries within itself the potential of becoming a dogma, ideology or stereotype as soon as that specific discourse starts to 'thicken' or to become self-evident. This is the moment where one has to start searching for alternatives: "The distrust of the stereotype (...) is a principle of absolute instability which respects nothing (no content, no choice). Nausea occurs whenever the liaison of two important words *follows of itself.* And when something follows of itself, I abandon it: that is bliss."[264] Therefore it is no surprise that Barthes' post-structuralist texts contain some structuralist terminology and concepts, although removed from their original systematic context. The structuralist and semiological analysis of sign-systems and discourses can still bear interesting insights into their structure, although only under the condition that they are not awarded the status of a universal meta-languages.

In his late texts Barthes is generally critical not only of his earlier linguistic, structuralist and semiological analyses but also of his appropriations of any other 'theory'. Irrespective whether it is Lacan's psychoanalysis, Althusser's Marxism, Sartre's existentialism or specific teachings in Zen, as useful as their insights may be, it is also crucial to be aware of their flaws and limited validity. In order to avoid creating a mere 'para-doxa' it is necessary to criticise these theories 'from within' by bringing any meaning and implicit values to a momentary halt. Barthes therefore writes that

> we do not form oppositions of named, fractionized values; we skirt, we avoid, we dodge such values: we take tangents; strictly speaking, this is not a change of course; the fear is that we fall into opposition, aggression, i.e. into meaning

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[262] Moriarty, *Roland Barthes*, 56.
[263] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 63.
[264] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 43.
See also "Doxa/Paradoxa." Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 71.

(since meaning is never anything but the trip lever of a counter-term, i.e., again: into that semantic solidarity which unites simple contraries.)[265]

For example, Barthes' utilisation of psychoanalysis shows a remarkable mixture of well-readness and sovereignty in applying its traditional paradigms, yet at the same time he purposely refuses to be a faithful disciple by adding a certain naivety and prose into its theorems. Although he often refers to the 'correct' Freudian or Lacanian text, he does this in a slightly ironic or frivolous manner that is inadequate to the status of psychoanalysis as a serious scientific institution.[266]

For Barthes psychoanalysis is not only a hermeneutic method but also a continued writing of the text it analyses, such as the text of a dream or a neurotic symptom. Barthes formulates in his elegant prose: "(The monument of psychoanalysis must be traversed – not bypassed – like the fine thoroughfares of a very large city, across which we can play, dream, etc.: a fiction.)"[267] Therefore Barthes does not comply with the requirements of thematic coherence and unity when he 'plays' with psychoanalytic formulas, but takes from here and there whatever seems to fit into his associations.[268] In a fragment from his 'auto-biography' with the title "Relation to Psychoanalysis" he writes that this is an undecided relationship.[269] Neither a strict advocate nor an outspoken opponent of psychoanalysis, he just uses it whenever it becomes available as inter-text.

One of the results of Barthes' turning away from structuralism is, that instead of replacing one paradigm through another (one doxa through a para-doxa) he added another 'language' or 'idiom' to his text-repertory. Yet again, he is aware of the fact that the newness of this style will also eventually vanish and consequently lose its subversive capacity. One might ask what one should do to stop this inevitable process happening? The most important and effective reaction is to be constantly aware of it and as soon as the first signs of the 'thickening' of a discourse appear one needs to start searching for a 'new language'. In the fragment titled "Doxa/Paradoxa" in *Roland Barthes*, Barthes writes about his 'scientific' phase 'text-theory'. "But again the Text risks paralysis: it repeats itself, counterfeits itself in

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[265] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 140.

[266] I still wonder, whether Barthes made the relationship he had with his mother purposely appear like an 'unresolved Oedipus' because it is a frequently recurring theme in his writing that suggests some kind of fixation to the 'mother imago'.

[267] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 58.

[268] An exemption from this general approach is his inquiry about the French historian Michelet (titled *Michelet*) from 1954, which is a relatively consistent psychoanalytically oriented text analysis.

[269] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 150.

lusterless texts, testimonies to a demand for readers, not for a desire to please: the Text tends to degenerate into prattle (*Babil*). Where to go next? That is where I am now."[270]

6.2 The Lexica of Photography

It is noteworthy that the commentators, historians and critics of photography mostly refer to Barthes' early texts on photography, which are part of his mythological and structuralist works. One reason may be that these texts appear to be relatively homogenous 'theories' which offer a general terminology that seems to be a helpful tool for the photographic critic. The texts in question were written between 1954 and 1964 and appeared in different magazines as essays and articles.[271] It is fairly obvious that all these texts still have the intention to 'demystify' and to 'enlighten'. In each of the short essays that were later published in the anthologies *Mythologies* and *The Eiffel Tower*, Barthes discusses a specific photograph or genre in order to expose its mythological content (its function to support specific myths). The later articles "The photographic message" and "Rhetoric of the image" show already Barthes' structuralist 'signature' even though they still have some of that enlightening tone of his former phase. The following paragraphs are dedicated to the two last mentioned articles, because historians of photography and photography critics draw most of their Barthes-quotes from these articles (besides *Camera Lucida*). Furthermore they do not only comprise the de-mystifying and structuralist elements but also textualist (post-structuralist) moments. It is necessary to analyse the structure of these articles if one attempts to put *Camera Lucida* in the larger context of his works. *Camera Lucida* contains a number of references to them which are best understood in terms of his transition from the structuralist to the post-structuralist phase.

In these articles Barthes tries to categorise the various elements that he thinks constitute the 'photographic message', its meaning, sense and content. This starting point is interesting in two ways. Firstly, because it expresses his attempt to determine the 'realism' of the photographic image in structuralist terminology, and secondly, because it implicitly supposes that the indexical function is not the only, although the most obvious component of the whole photographic message. Barthes takes up a question which is almost as old as photography itself, because shortly after its invention people became aware of the fact that there are many

[270] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 71.

ways to manipulate the purely descriptive mode of photographs by adding 'external signs' which create meanings that comprise more than the depicted 'thing'. In contrast to most other fine arts, in photography it seems more difficult to detect these further signs and messages. The realistic character in photography is so dominant that usually it overshadows all other significant (signifying) elements. One could thus formulate that a photograph means what it depicts, and since the depiction comprises only the mirror image of a limited field (frame, view) of reality, one can conclude that photography is a more or less neutral medium for storing visual information.

One of its main characteristics is that this storing process is an analogical transformation, which means that the light rays that are reflected by the photographed objects, leave unmediated traces on the storage medium (usually silver-halides of the film-emulsion). In Barthes' view

> to shift from reality to its photograph, it is not at all necessary to break down this reality into units and to constitute these units into signs substantially different from the object they represent; between this object and its image, it is not at all necessary to arrange a relay, i.e., a code; of course, the image is not the reality, but at least it is its perfect *analogon*, and it is just this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph. Here the particular status of the photographic image appears: *it is a message without a code*;"[272]

Barthes' goal is to use his structuralist terminology and analytical tools to uncover the connoted code which is hidden underneath the 'mask of neutrality'. The starting point for this is the fact that generally photographs are situated within a specific context, that invests them with meaning that exceeds its purely analogical function. To be more exact one needs to say contexts, because there are a number of different levels where connotations enter the image. For example, through the symbolic meaning of the photographed objects, the photographer's aesthetical approach, the political and ideological influence of the market-place or through the subjective perception of the viewers.

As we have seen, Barthes' attempt to create a systematic categorisation of the various language-levels of the 'language of fashion' requires the exclusion of his own meta-language, which is why the structuralist principles lose their universal status and become a mere

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[271] I am referring to the following articles: "Photography and Electoral Appeal" and "The Great Family of Man," both published in *Mythologies*; "Shock-Photos," "Myth Today," and "The Harcourt Actor," published in *The Eiffel Tower*; also "The Photographic Message" and "Rhetoric of the image," both published in *Communications*.

[272] Barthes, "The Photographic Message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 5.

empirical method. Once an exception is made it becomes impossible to make valid predictions about future events.

It is important to recognise Barthes' own doubts about the validity and feasibility of his 'semiotic adventure', which are already present in some of his early semiological texts. In a number of contexts, Barthes speaks about the necessity to further elaborate the relationship between linguistics and semiology. In order to avoid becoming an empirical discipline, the semiological analysis of a sign system can not draw its basic principles from the sphere of objects of its research, but instead has to deduce them through purely logical operations. Therefore he writes in the introduction to his semiological founding text *Elements of Semiology* that this science is still a provisional construct, made up of principles and insights from linguistics.

> Though it will doubtless be required some day to change its character, semiology must first of all, if not exactly take definite shape, at least *try itself out*, explore its possibilities and impossibilities. This is feasible only on the basis of preparatory investigation. And indeed it must be acknowledged in advance that such an investigation is both diffident and rash: diffident because semiological knowledge at present can be only a copy of linguistic knowledge; rash because this knowledge must be applied forthwith, at least as a project, to non-linguistic objects. The elements here presented have as their sole aim the extraction from linguistics of analytical concepts which we think a priori sufficiently general to start semiological research on its way. (...) We are merely suggesting and elucidating a terminology in the hope that it may enable an initial (albeit provisional) order to be introduced into the heterogeneous mass of significant facts.[273]

Even if it would be possible to constitute a semiological science on the principles of linguistics, one would still have to question whether the underlying linguistic axioms are purely rational and non-empirical, because this would be the necessary condition for any semiology which claims to be universally valid. In his text "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives", Barthes speaks about the fact that such a project faces the difficulty that in order to induce its basic principles it needed to analyse the structure of every existing narrative, which is, of course, impossible. Instead, it is first necessary to assume a hypothetical model which serves as a basis for the analysis, which is exactly what is offered

[273] Barthes *Elements of Semiology*, 11-2.
See also Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, 74-5.

by linguistics.[274] Yet, we have to insist on asking about the a priori status of linguistics itself. Saussure's solution for the problem, that it was impossible to include in his inquiry all real past and future linguistic expressions made it necessary for him to introduce a general differentiation into language, viz. on the one hand the sum of all concrete speech-acts (parole) and on the other hand the sum of all the rules (langue) which are the pre-condition for the speech-acts (expressions). In a simplified way one could say that linguistics does not ask what certain expressions or signs mean but in what way they create meaning. This can easily be understood by the fact that a subject or individual which belongs to a certain 'speech community' has to follow a set of grammatical and lexical rules in order to understand and be understood by others, whereas to disregard these rules results in the loss of one's ability to communicate.

The methodologically important differentiation between langue and parole is especially useful to show why Barthes' 'dream' of a rationalistic semiology in the form of a universal theory had to fail. Although it is true that every linguistic expression follows certain rules, the rules and the concrete content (meaning) of an expression always appear as a unity. Therefore it seems impossible to study the rules separately from the content which they structure, because without parole there would be no langue either. Consequently it is not possible to set up a hierarchy between langue and parole either, because language does not first exist as an ensemble of rules through which the production of meaning becomes possible. The two spheres are inseparably interrelated which means that Saussure's presumed differentiation between parole and langue is not the result of his linguistic science but the necessary condition for it. Mary Bittner Wiseman writes about this in her comment on Barthes' inaugural speech at the 'Collège de France' which shows very clearly his changed attitude towards linguistics and its usefulness as a foundation for a semiological science.

> Language is pure, Barthes suggests, only because it has wiped itself off on the skeins of discourse. But language and discourse are not separate. The rules of language govern not only phonemes, words, and their syntactical combinations; the whole stratum of discourse is subject to 'rules, constraints, oppressions, repressions, including all those passions and actions, states of mind and pattern of behaviour, out of which active language is made. What is left over after separating out the rules of grammar is itself rule-governed: there is no pure *Grundstoff* out of which active language is made.[275]

[274] See Barthes "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative." *Image, Music, Text*. 82-5.
[275] Mary Bittner Wiseman, *The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes*, 57-8.

Thirteen years after the publication of *Elements of Semiology* it became obvious that the methodological approach of Barthes' semiology was exhausted and had turned almost into its opposite. The goal is no longer to reach the same scientific objectivity as its 'role-model-science' linguistics, but to explore a sphere of language which eludes scientific treatment. "Semiology is no longer conceived as a science (...) but that by the exclusion of which linguistics can be a science: it is, then, precisely what is not science."[276]

The reference to Barthes' poststructuralist phase is important for two reasons. Firstly in order to show that Barthes' abolition of the claim to produce objective and scientific semiologies has its roots in logical insufficiencies and inconsistencies, and secondly that despite his later critique he still sees them as limited possibilities to explain the dynamics and structure of a number of signifying processes. Barthes' turning away from structuralism in the seventies is not only caused by his doubts about its 'truth' and scientific legitimacy but also by his personal interests, his preferences and the ongoing search for a 'new language' in order to avoid a discourse to 'coagulate', to become self-evident or to dwindle from a former avant-garde impulse to a mere paradigm or doxa. Exactly this, one can assume, would have happened if he had continued using linguistic principles as foundations for further 'semiological adventures'.

The articles "The Photographic Message" and "Rhetoric of the Image" still belong to his main structuralist phase. Both texts were meant to generate an index of significant structural characteristics of photography, which would, once and for all, offer a reliable tool for the critique of ideological elements in any photographic genre.[277] In the same way as linguistics relies on concrete speech acts as examples and illustrations of its principles, Barthes faces the necessity to validate the categories of his semiology of photography by applying them to concrete photographs or photographic genre. In "The Photographic Message" the press-photograph is the object of his inquiry and in "Rhetoric of the Image" it is the advertising photograph. In the introduction to "Rhetoric of the Image" Barthes writes:

> How does meaning get into the image? Where does it end? And if it ends, what is there *beyond*? Such are the questions that I wish to raise by submitting the image to a spectral analysis of the messages it may contain. We will start by making it considerably easier for ourselves: we will only study the advertising image. Why? Because in advertising the signification or the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed *a priori* by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible. If the image contains signs, we can be sure

[276] Mary Bittner Wiseman, *The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes*, 57.

that in advertising these signs are full, formed with a view to the optimum reading.[278]

The decision to consider only advertising photographs makes Barthes' task considerably easier than the harmless sentence suggests, because it means not only something like practicability (e.g. the magazine where the article is published offers only a limited number of pages), but it also is a subtle attempt to adjust the object of the semiological analysis to the formerly chosen method. When Barthes states that the meaning of advertising and press-photographs is fully intentional[279], Barthes assumes a priori what should be the result of the structuralist analysis. In this context 'intentional' can only mean that all its signifiers have an unambiguous relationship to their signifieds, which is determined by the respective product (in advertising photography) or by the 'facts' to be presented (in photojournalism).

Before Barthes begins to create an inventory of the different levels on which the additional, or coded sense enters the photograph, he emphasises that the difference between the denoted and the connoted sense of a photograph is one of its main characteristics. Yet again, it is questionable whether that which Barthes calls the denoted image or the raw-photograph is indeed a description of reality and not a mere hypothetical construct, which functions as a hidden premise for his structural analysis, because it is a logical necessity that con-notations need something that is (exists) prior to them i.e. notions.[280]

For the structuralist Barthes, photography is the only medium which functions without a specific cultural code, i.e. it does not rely on discontinuous signs and a system of transformative rules. He thinks of it in terms of "the non-culture of a 'mechanical' art"[281] which acquires cultural value only through addition of connotations. For Barthes photography is fundamentally different from any other visual medium (e.g. drawing, painting) because of its analogical character. Contrary to photography the other visual media are always coded in one way or the other. Barthes: "(T)here is no essential nature of the pictorial copy and the codes of transposition are historical (notably those concerning perspective)."[282]

Another code of the drawing is its style, which is always an essential element of its meaning. In addition, drawing has to be learned which is another indication that it is an artificial and thus culturally acquired technique. Although Barthes' characterisation of the drawing is generally accurate he seems wrong in seeing it fundamentally different from photography. For

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[277] See Barthes, "The Photographic Message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 20.
[278] Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image." *Image, Music, Text*. 32-3.
[279] Or in other words that all their signifying elements are strictly intentional.
[280] And vice versa that 'thing' which is prior and which he calls the 'raw photograph' or the 'denoted message' can not exist unless a cultural code is added to it, because it would otherwise have no meaning for us.
[281] Barthes, "The Photographic Message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 20.

example, the appearance of three-dimensionality in photography has to be understood as the paradigm for the central perspective layout of realistic paintings and drawings.[283] The second point in Barthes' argument too has got its exact analogy in photography because style is always one of its essential elements, and even the attempt to avoid any particular style must be understood as a culturally determined code. In this context it is important to consider Barthes' comments on the literary genre 'realism' which is unable to objectively describe or represent reality like any other literary style. "Neutral writing is a late phenomenon to be invented only much later than Realism by authors like Camus, less under the impulse of an aesthetics of escape than in search of a mode of writing which might at last achieve innocence. The writing of Realism is far from being neutral, it is on the contrary loaded with the most spectacular signs of fabrication."[284] In the same way one could formulate that photography is a late invention of modernity whose realism is not neutral but always loaded with ideology.

Barthes frequently remarks that photographs are generally connoted and therefore always stylistically charged. Yet, in his early articles he also maintains that we have to assume a neutral, absolutely realistic and purely analogical level in photographs where coded technique and subjective style are still absent. It is necessary to question this presupposition, because adhering a dualism of this kind (even as a work-hypothesis) inevitably strengthens the paradigm of modernity, which is that reality 'exists' independent of language, or more generally, independent of our subjectivity.

Despite Barthes' original intention to criticise and de-mystify bourgeois ideology and mass-culture, he was unable to completely overcome their basic structures. The third characteristic of the drawing that he mentions is yet another indication that he failed to establish two strictly different ontological levels of the image. He states that "(f)inally, like all codes, the drawing demands an apprenticeship (Saussure attributed a great importance to this semiological fact)."[285] Needless to say that the 'art of photography' too requires to learn certain techniques, aesthetical and communicative skills etc.[286]

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[282] R. Barthes, "Rhetoric of the image." *Image, Music, Text.* 43.

[283] The mechanics and optics of photography (camera obscura) was already used by a number of Renaissance painters viz. in order to improve the accurateness of the perspective of the depicted objects and scenes.

[284] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 67-8.

[285] Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image', *Image, Music, Text.* 43.

[286] Even though nowadays taking photographs is as easy as switching on a light bulb, this does not imply that the process itself is simple or primitive and natural in the sense of uncoded. The fact that the engineers of the photographic industry do all the constructing, calculating and experimenting, does not mean that photography as such is losing its complexity and artificiality. In the same sense we would not call the calculation of mathematical formulas through computers simple and natural. In fact photographic technique is based on a far more complex knowledge than it was a hundred years ago, which is most noticeable in digital photography.

The pre-history of photography shows us that its invention in 1839 was the temporary climax of a long and very complex process rather than a mere accidental discovery. Many people were involved in it who experimented and researched for almost 400 years, and each of them contributed some essential knowledge to the whole process that made it possible to finally fixate the fleeting mirror-images of the Camera Obscura. Therefore every photograph, independent of its content, has got an a priori, artificial and intentional meaning. Photographs are not natural things or events like, for example, the 'life-like' images of reality which happen to appear in 'natural' mirror-surfaces (e.g. water). Although the two image-genre might look very similar, the crucial difference between them is that photographs are, of course, artificial (cultural) products.[287] A critique of photography thus has to start with the essential question: What is the reason for wanting to 'catch', document or fixate a visual perception instead of letting it pass by? In Barthes' own terminology one could formulate that the fixation of the "literal reality"[288] represents already the first connotation. The will to hold on to a certain moment in time is an intentional, significant act, which relies on a large set of technical apparatuses.

The reason why photography is still considered to be a realistic, neutral and objective medium lies in the fact that it coincides with one of the crucial paradigms of modernity, viz. that our visual sense enables us to access reality in an unmediated and uncoded way. The special character of this 'accessibility' has constantly been examined and challenged by the critical philosophies of the twentieth century, viz. with the intention to strip visual metaphors of their privilege to be closer to 'the truth' than others. This also helps us to understand photography's broader socio-political implications because it is a direct expression or symptom of the contemporary visual episteme, which could be called a metaphysics of light.[289]

Despite the very structured and scientific tone of "The Photographic Message" and "Rhetoric of the Image" Barthes frequently asks us to consider that his inquiries are only preliminary work for a future semiotic analysis of photography. Although he thinks that the methods and the terminology of linguistics are employed correctly, he is also aware of the difficulty that their respective objects of inquiry (here language, there photographic images) are not the same. Whilst in language the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary (in

[287] In philosophical terms one might also call photography 'the will to fixate mirror images'.

[288] Barthes, "The Photographic Message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 5.

[289] It is important to acknowledge that besides the demystifying and classificatory intention of Barthes' structuralist texts on photography, they anticipate a number of themes which occur again in *Camera Lucida* and the 'sketch-book' for his unfinished project on visuality. ("Auge in Auge." *Der Stumpfe und der Entgegenkommende Sinn*) In some instances one could almost think that in these different texts, written sixteen years apart, Barthes has just slightly set different accents but kept the general message the same.

Saussure's terminology), or unmotivated (in Barthes' terms[290]), signifiers in photographs are usually called indices and their structure is a direct result of their meaningful signified. Because of their analogical character they do not form discrete and discontinuous units whose combination generates the sense (meaning). Therefore, Barthes writes that

> the connoted message does comprise a level of expression and a level of content, of signifiers and of signifieds: hence it requires a veritable deciphering. This deciphering would be premature at present, for in order to isolate the signifying units and the themes (or values) signified, we should have to undertake (perhaps by tests) certain directed readings, making certain elements of the photograph vary artificially, in order to observe whether these variations of forms involve variations of meaning.[291]

It is remarkable to notice the way Barthes' original confidence in his project to subject photography to a semiological analysis is slowly undermined, viz. by his own frequent comments which describe that project as difficult, in-complete and finally even as impossible. It is worth to carefully listen to the previously quoted sentence again: "This deciphering would be premature at present ... ," because, we can add, the respective tests have not been carried out yet. Thus we have to ask: What is the foundation for Barthes' list of the discovered connotation procedures? And, perhaps even more importantly, where does his strong conviction that it is possible to carry out a structuralist interpretation come from, despite all the obvious difficulties and flaws?

We have already discussed the first question in regard to the differentiation between a deductive and inductive science.[292] The second question can be answered in a number of ways, of which one has been 'authorised' by Barthes whereas the others can be detected only by carefully reading between the lines of his texts. His declared intention could briefly be described as exposing and de-masking the ideological and mythical content of photographs which circulate in the various bourgeois institutions. Although Barthes frequently emphasises that, contrary to his analyses in *Mythologies*, these later texts are not concerned about concrete ideological contents anymore but rather with their general structure, he still depends on references to specific photographs in order to determine them.

Hence I find his analysis of, for example, Edward Steichen's famous photo-exhibition "The Family of Man" (1955) much more effective and believable, because he is not under constant

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[290] See Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 50-1.

[291] Barthes, "The Photographic Message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 8.
(See also Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 52.)

[292] Some linguistic principles can be used to constitute a work-hypothesis which allows us to formally analyse some press and advertising photographs.

pressure to strictly differentiate between content and form (structure) in order to fulfil a specific scientific ideal. In this short essay it is still possible to sense an enlightened (Marxist) 'anti-humanism' which is not ashamed of its own bias that represents a kind of 'para-doxa'.

> Everything here, the content and appeal of the pictures, the discourse which justifies them, aims to suppress the determining weight of History: we are held back at the surface of an identity, prevented precisely by sentimentality from penetrating into this ulterior zone of human behaviour where historical alienation introduces some 'differences' which we shall quite simply call 'injustices'.[293]

Yet in "The Photographic Message" and in "Rhetoric of the Image" there are some short sections where Barthes discusses in general the function of the intentionally charged structure of the photographs he examines. One could understand them as a functional characterisation of the connotation.

> (F)or by trying to reconstitute in its specific structure the connotation-code of a communication as broad as the press photograph, we may hope to recognize in all their complexity the forms our society employs to reassure itself, and thereby grasp the extent, the detours, and the deep function of this effort. (...) (F)or the connotation resulting from knowledge is always a reassuring power: man loves signs, and he loves them to be clear.[294]

And in "Rhetoric of the Image" he adds that "(t)he text is indeed the creator's (and hence society's) right of inspection over the image; (...) With respect to the liberty of the signifieds of the image, the text has thus a repressive value and we can see that it is at this level that the morality and ideology of a society are above all invested."[295]

It is important that we listen very carefully to the subtle undertones in these remarks and ask: Who exactly employs various structuralist hypothesis and formal methods in order to 'be soothed'? Furthermore, who in this discourse between photography, its ideological producers (press, politics, advertising) and the structuralist analyst (Barthes) loves the signs and even more their clarity? And, who in this discourse produces a text which strictly supervises the 'reading' of the exemplary photographs and therefore restrains the possibilities of understanding the signifiers of the images?

I think that Barthes was not aware of the 'blind spot' of these texts because he obviously did not realise that his structuralist critique of (bourgeois) ideology was at the same time the

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[293] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 101.
[294] Barthes, "The Photographic Message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 18/20.
[295] Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image." *Image, Music, Text*. 40.

production of another ideological dogma.. Therefore Barthes' structuralist aspirations and his attempts to create a semiological science are good examples for the production of a para-doxa, which is based on the same ontological and epistemological conditions and premises as the Doxa it aims to 'decompose'.

6.3 A Future Semiology of Photography

This critique of Barthes' texts needs some clarification because my intention is not to show that Barthes was generally wrong or that he has chosen the false method and that therefore his semiological contribution to the understanding of photography is devoid of any value. The main point of this critique is to prepare us for the many references to his other important text on photography: *Camera Lucida*. That also means that it was not necessarily an ingenious move to deconstruct Barthes' structuralism because some years further down his intellectual career he openly admitted that his semiological and structuralist adventure was doomed to fail. *Camera Lucida* could be understood as a performative act of his awareness of the flaws and shortcomings of the structuralist analysis of photography.

One of the most important points in his revised understanding of photography lies in the seemingly impossible attempt to interpret photographs at a level 'beyond language' instead of analysing their connoted meanings.[296] This is also an argument for the fact that *Camera Lucida* does not represent a progressive move towards 'the truth', but instead another attempt to describe the various difficulties, paradoxes and terminological flaws in a different context and using a different terminology. In "The photographic message" this beyond language is still very much located within the differentiation between denoted and connoted message, whereas in *Camera Lucida* Barthes puts it in context with the Satori in Zen and the 'unintentional' Haiku, which is a specific form of lyrics in Japanese.[297]

In order to understand the following quotation it is necessary to be aware of the basis of Barthes' structuralist analysis of photography, which is that the 'raw photograph' is primarily an analogical image which is invested with an additional and external meaning (the connotations). It seems thus remarkable that under the header "The photographic non-signification" he expresses further doubts as to whether a semiology of photography might be possible because of the hypothetically infinite number of cultural (historical) signs which

[296] The expression 'beyond language' is already a first draft of a concept which in *Camera Lucida* gains central meaning under the header "the *punctum*".

needed to be deciphered. The complete inventory of signs though becomes impossible when one realises that there are no reliable criteria with which to determine the exact border between the denoted and the connoted message. If this is the case one has to assume that basically everything in photographs can function as a meaningful sign.

> No one knows if there are 'neutral' parts of a photograph, or at least it may be that utter non-signification in photographs is altogether exceptional; in order to solve this problem, we should first have to elucidate completely the mechanisms of reading (in the physical, and no longer semantic, meaning of the term), or one might say, of perceiving the photograph; How do we read a photograph? What do we perceive? In what order, according to what itinerary? What is it, in fact, to 'perceive'? If, according to certain hypotheses of Bruner and Piaget, there is no perception without immediate categorization, the photograph is verbalized at the very moment it is perceived; or better still: it is perceived only when verbalized. (...) In this perspective, the image, immediately apprehended by an interior metalanguage, which is language itself, actually has no denoted state; it exists socially only when immersed in at least a primary connotation, that of the categories of language.[298]

One immediate consequence of the hypothetically unlimited field of possible meanings is that it is highly questionable as to whether it makes sense to reduce them to a few significant elements for the sake of adhering to the principles of semiology. A semiology which is unable to determine the exact extension of the structures it examines is necessarily suspicious because it is quite likely that it relies on exclusions, reductions and omissions.

Yet, Barthes' subtle and careful formulation ('If, according to certain hypotheses of Bruner and Piaget ... ') suggests that in photography such 'beyond language' might still be possible even though we are unable to think and describe it in rational terms. Therefore he provisionally coins the term 'trauma' which he characterises as that which "suspends language and blocks signification."[299] It is very important though to differentiate between a traumatic image and an image that depicts a traumatic situation (catastrophe, accident, violence). The latter one might well be coded, whereas the traumatic image conveys only one 'message' which does not necessarily have to be linked to the depicted objects as such. All that is required for an image to be traumatic is that "*the photographer had to be there* (this is the

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[297] See Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 69-71.
[298] R. Barthes, "The Photographic Message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 17.
[299] R. Barthes, "The Photographic Message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 19.

mythical definition of denotation);"[300] This simple formula recurs in a slightly different tone in *Camera Lucida* where Barthes uses it as one possible characterisation of what he thinks to be the essence of photography.[301] He also mentions this difference between the traumatic image and the image that depicts a trauma in the short essay "Shock-Photos" (*The Eiffel Tower*). Here again he describes the traumatic as that where language fails, where the signification-process comes to a halt.[302]

Barthes' original intention to categorise photography's various lexica (languages, connotation levels) is based on the assumption that these lexica are indeed discrete and distinguishable techniques. During the course of the two articles, Barthes believes to have identified seven of the most important "levels of analysis of photographic connotation"[303], despite the lack of tests and the foreign terminology 'borrowed' from linguistics. These connotation levels are: 1) photo-montage or trick-effects, 2) the pose, 3) the objects, 4) photogeneity, 5) aestheticism, 6) syntax and 7) linking image and text. Instead of discussing each of these techniques in detail, it seems more useful to search again for the implicit doubts and qualifications of the texts. The first oddity is already present in the introductory sentences, where Barthes writes: "(H)ence it is possible to separate out certain connotation procedures; but we must remember that such procedures have nothing to do with units of signification, as a subsequent analysis of a semantic kind may one day define them: they do not strictly belong to the photographic structure."[304] Yet, what is the heuristic value of a structural analysis which produces an inventory of connotation processes that are only preparatory steps for a future semantic analysis, and which furthermore do not even belong to the photographic structure itself but instead to the various levels or spheres of the production of photographs?

Barthes writes that on the level of the photo-montage, the pose and the objects cause an alteration of the real, whereas photogeneity, aestheticism and syntax affect the photograph as such. Yet, it is also true that photo-montage affects the photograph and not only the real, and

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[300] R. Barthes, "The Photographic Message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 19.

[301] The ability of photography to link the 'here' and 'now' with the past ('Thus it has been', or 'That has been') is also discussed in "Rhetoric of the Image." which is another reason to understand these two articles (written at the peak of his structuralist phase) as one text. The fact that one of them is especially concerned with the press-photo and the other with advertising photography plays only a minor role.

[302] See Barthes, "Shock-Photos." *The Eiffel Tower*, 71-73.
I believe that this concept is very helpful to answer the question, why many photographs which should shock us (which should evoke empathy, fear, disgust etc.) leave us strangely untouched. Thus I have always asked myself why - for example - Lee Miller's famous photographs from 1945 of the piles of dead bodies in the Nazi-concentration camps had only a mediocre effect on me whereas the image of her taking a bath in Hitler's bathtub in his Munich mansion I find much more shocking (perhaps because of its obvious absurdity and perversity). Yet there is no doubt that this is a subjective (personal) reaction only, and the same photographs affect other viewers in a different way.

[303] Barthes, "The photographic message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 8.

[304] Barthes, "The photographic message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 9.

photogeneity is effective on the level of the objects and therefore the real too. The problems of Barthes' systematisation leading to a terminological jumble instead of a formally elegant and scientific structural analysis are again very obvious. And yet, these difficulties do not necessarily mean that the above mentioned categories and connotation-procedures have nothing to offer for an understanding of the various signifying levels in photographs.

My critique is mainly aiming at Barthes' attempt to build a semiological systematic on the basis of a few heterogeneous and empirical concepts. Only a few pages after this provisional list of connotation processes Barthes offers us more evidence for the conclusion that such systematic might be impossible because it contains too many cultural and historical variables. This means that the connotation processes change not only in time but also between different subjects and cultures. "Thanks to its code of connotation, the reading of the photograph is therefore always historical; it depends on the reader's 'knowledge,' just as if this were a matter of a real language, intelligible only if one has learned its signs."[305] Is this not true for Barthes' structural analysis as well which is, of course, determined (marked) by his subjective and historical knowledge? This is yet another example of the general problem that 'meta-languages' are not completely self-referential, i.e. they can not objectify their own structure. In order to do this a 'meta-meta-language' would be needed.[306]

The same theme appears in "Rhetoric of the image" where Barthes fails again to acknowledge that the interdependency between connotations and the lexica of their recipients applies to his own writing as well. "(E)ach sign corresponds to a body of 'attitudes' – tourism, housekeeping, knowledge of art – certain of which may obviously be lacking in this or that individual."[307] In this sense one could formulate that Barthes' structuralist analyses of photography lack some of the most important lexica (attitudes) which he displays in *Camera Lucida*, where the connoted, historically and culturally coded elements of photography play only a minor role. He calls the 'structuralist' or coded elements in an almost derogatory fashion the *studium* of a photograph, whereas that which signifies the 'beyond language' (and which will eventually disclose itself as the essence of photography) he labels the image's *punctum*.

It does not seem superfluous to emphasise again, that despite my critique of the discussed texts, my aim was not to prove their worthlessness regarding the understanding of the production of meaning in photographic images, irrespective of their methodological flaws and terminological shortcomings. If this would have been my intention one could indeed ask why

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[305] Barthes, "The photographic message." *The Responsibility of Forms*, 17.

[306] See Wiseman, *The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes*, 59.
In my view we have to understand Barthes' frequent references to a future semiology of photography as his own feeling that, until so far, his analyses are unsystematic and incomplete.

[307] Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image." *Image, Music, Text*. 47.

it was necessary to analyse these texts in such detail. The reason for the rather lengthy discussion is the fact that they contain many important references to *Camera Lucida*. Without a sufficient analysis and critique of Barthes' structuralist texts on photography, it would be much more difficult to make sense of the fragmentary and unsystematic character of *Camera Lucida*.

6.4 "What Does My Body Know about Photography?"[308]

Camera Lucida contains forty eight short paragraphs, which have an average length of a few pages and are often accompanied by exemplary photographs.[309] The text as a whole is divided in two 'books', of which each contains half of the forty eight fragments. In regard to the content, both books have a different 'leitmotif' for their quest for the ontological status of photography.[310] Contrary to the semiological approach in "The Photographic Message" and "Rhetoric of the Image", in *Camera Lucida* Barthes is not concerned with the specific structures of a certain photographic genre, but instead asks for the qualities that make photography different from all other image genre, which is implicitly to ask for its essence.
The search for the essence is a theme which is, to some extent, already present in his structuralist texts, which is also why *Camera Lucida* is not the expression of a completely new theoretical approach. Yet, what is mainly new is its methodology and the consequent reformulation of an old truth that makes this text look less like an academic treatise but rather like an art-form.[311] Barthes carries out the reformulation of that truth with a decisive gesture of distancing himself from his 'structuralist past', because his writing about photography has always been marked by the following dilemma:

> (T)he uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical; and at the heart of this critical language, between several discourses, those of sociology, of semiology, and of psychoanalysis - but that, by ultimate dissatisfaction with all of them, I was bearing witness to

[308] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 9.
[309] In the German issue of *Camera Lucida* text and photographs are not completely 'synchronised'. Often Barthes delays showing the photographs he is talking about or referring to. This generates a tension with a significant effect that is more interesting than the usual illustration of the text with a photo, and the usual explanation of a photograph with words.
[310] Steven Ungar characterises the two 'books' of *Camera Lucida* with concepts he borrows from music ('Ode/Palinode') because the French title of *Camera Lucida* is *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie.* The term 'note' in French alludes to the music genre 'sonata'. (See Ungar, *Roland Barthes. The Professor of Desire.*)

> the only sure thing that was in me (however naïve it might be): a desperate resistance to any reductive system.[312]

And indeed, *Camera Lucida* does not any longer show the signs of the attempt to produce a semiological system and an enlightened demystification and explanation of connoted meanings. The sphere of the inquiry and the concrete photographs he examines are very different, because Barthes is now free to move through all genre and aesthetical spheres without being concerned about their common structural base (or their differences).

What kind of method or attitude, one must ask, could Barthes possibly adopt after having rejected the traditional scientific languages which deal with this subject matter? In order to find an answer for this question I think it could be helpful to start with an analysis of the title of this paragraph which is a quote from *Camera Lucida*: "What does my body know about photography?"[313] This is a formulation which Barthes had used already seven years earlier in an almost identical form, in *The Pleasure of the Text*. It is an expression of Barthes' generally critical attitude towards strictly academic texts, including his own. Situating Barthes' concept of corporeality (the body) in a broader context is important because it enables us to illustrate his remarkable ability to deconstruct his own texts and methods without having to abandon the criticised terms completely. For example, the way he uses the term 'body' in this context suggests that it does not have the opposite meaning of the term 'mind' but instead refers to something in-between, implying that the strict differentiation between mind and body is not necessary, not desirable and probably impossible. Body and mind are not the same, and yet since they are always intertwined they never 'exist' on their own. The one is unthinkable without the other as in the case of the relationship between signifier and signified or between denoted and connoted messages in photographic images.

The fact that Barthes' post-structuralist, phenomenological and self-reflective texts lend greater emphasis to the concept of the body than to the mind (rationality) is a sign of a counter-reaction which shows that he had not yet found a balance between these antagonistic concepts. It is not surprising that 'the body' has a certain priority in his later texts since for years his writings were determined by the rationality and logic of 'academic' structuralism. The following paragraphs which are taken from a context where Barthes develops the important differentiation between 'the text of pleasure' and 'the text of bliss' clearly show, that here is no doubt that in his view 'the body' is endowed with intelligence, language,

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[311] See for example Patrizia Lombardo, *The Three Paradoxes of Roland Barthes*, 114; Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes*, 198; Ungar, *Roland Barthes. The Professor of Desire*, 137; Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory. Criticism and Postmodernity*, 88.

[312] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 8.

[313] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 9.

expressivity and its own will. "The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas – for my body does not have the same ideas I do."[314] Hence we can assume that his question "What does my body know about photography?"[315] also refers to the corporeal knowledge and ideas which are different from the ones of his 'ego'.

Camera Lucida contains many references to a number of different philosophies of which some are explicitly expressed (especially his 'intellectual debt' to Sartre, Lacan and Proust) whereas others are often only vaguely mentioned through subtle allusions. His attitude towards these theories is similar to the way he treats psychoanalysis. He uses the theories (including his own structuralism) without the due 'respect' and without concern for their coherence. The quote from *The Pleasure of the Text* still expresses the existential gap between the ideas of the ego and the ideas of the body, yet in *Camera Lucida* Barthes tries to 'reunite' them through his phenomenological terminology. In an un-apologetically existentialist manner he writes: "So I resolved to start my inquiry with no more than a few photographs, the ones I was sure existed for me. Nothing to do with a corpus: only some bodies."[316] In his 'auto-biography' Barthes calls the term 'body' his 'mana-word' which stands out because of its quasi-sacred qualities and the complexity and vagueness of its meanings. "Such a word is neither eccentric nor central; it is motionless and carried, floating, never pigeonholed, always atopic (escaping any topic), at once remainder and supplement (...)."[317] One of the signs of its flexibility and ambiguity can be found in the fact that it always 'existed' in his texts although camouflaged by the terminology of his respective scientific phase.[318]

The ambiguity of a number of terms and concepts and the resistance against a definite meaning is also one of the main characteristics of Barthes' style in *Camera Lucida*. Yet again, his main goal is not to erase all sense but to create hybrids in as many contexts as possible. For example, his concept of the body shows strong references to Sartre's phenomenology and to the general understanding of corporeality in psychoanalysis, e.g. as bodily symptoms of neurotic disorders which also includes Lacan's concept of the language-like structure of the unconscious. When Barthes writes in the fragment "Emotion as Departure" that he intends "making what Nietzsche called the 'ego's ancient sovereignty' into an heuristic principle,"[319] he does not only include the corporeality of this ego, but all antagonistic elements that together constitute the person called Roland Barthes. A little later in the text he reveals to us

[314] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 17.
[315] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 9.
[316] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 8.
[317] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 129.
[318] See Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 130.
[319] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 8.

the meaning of the critical undertone in Nietzsche's ironic term 'ancient sovereignty': "(M)yself which is light, divided, dispersed; like a bottle-imp, myself doesn't hold still, giggling in my jar:"[320] It is obvious that the critique is directed at Descarte's 'last truth' or 'first principle' (the 'I' which thinks and therefore exists) which is the only thing that remains 'solid' after all deceptions and illusions have been eliminated by his rigorous and systematic doubts about the reliability of our senses.

In my opinion the first fragments of *Camera Lucida*, where Barthes develops his non-scientific method, represent a subtle and ironic mimicking of the 'opening scene' of Descartes' *Meditationes* although with the difference that Barthes' 'systematic doubts' are a reversal of the original. Whereas Descartes departed from the sphere of the sensual and, step by step, eliminated everything that did not have the assumed rational qualities, Barthes begins by excluding from his methodology all rationalities (scientific languages) which are not of empirical-sensual character, which leads to a concept of the 'I' that is a chaotic accumulation of ideas, feelings, desires, and unconscious wishes (it has thus nothing of Descartes' unconditioned and non-dividable 'I'.) In Descartes' text the 'devil' (or in Barthes' term 'bottle-imp' of which he says it does not hold still) is something external to the 'I' (an evil spirit as opponent of a good god), whereas in Barthes it is an integral part of the 'I' which lacks any a priori structures or systematic. "You are a patchwork of reactions: is there anything primary in you?"[321] he writes in the fragment "The self divided" in *Roland Barthes*. This patchwork-like 'I' becomes the starting point for Barthes' search for the essence of photography insofar as it is strongly touched or, in Barthes' words, given a soul to by a certain photograph.[322]

One could formulate that *Camera Lucida* is a compilation of autobiographical, novelistic, art-historical, philosophical and psychological reflections and that the implicit links between these fragmented elements are not determined by logical stringency (fragment A is the premise for fragment B etc.) but by Barthes' empirical 'viewing-experiences' which are completely governed by his subjective interest for certain photographs. In his words: "*I like / I don't like.*"[323]

There are two important questions directly related to the apparently simple mode to differentiate between images he likes and images he does not like. Firstly, one has to ask for the specific qualities of this 'liking' in order to understand something about the photograph it

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[320] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 12.
[321] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 143.
[322] Interestingly he further qualifies the general validity of his method because his emotional link to photography is limited to two of the three possible photographic activities, because he is not a practising photographer and can therefore only speculate about this sphere, whereas he has first hand experience in looking at and examining photographs and also in being the photographed object.

relates to, and secondly one has to ask for the photographic elements which evoke that subjective feeling, thereby constituting the existential condition 'for me' (" ... to start my inquiry with no more than a few photographs, the ones I was sure existed *for me*"[324]). In order to further understand the phenomenological criterion 'to like/not to like' it might be helpful to mention a few of the synonyms he sometimes uses instead, which are 'interest', 'pleasure', 'wish', 'love' and 'compassion'. It is very typical for his post-structuralist texts to multiply the meaning of terms by stringing together a number of synonyms, metonymies and associations instead of trying to explain or define them. This method is not only expressing his resistance towards the reductionism of the scientific text, but also a basic condition for the unfolding of the pleasure of the text.[325] Barthes calls these terms 'transitional words' which have a similar function as "those pillow corners and pieces of the sheet which the child stubbornly sucks. As for the child, these favourite words constitute a part of his arena; and like transitional objects, they are of uncertain status; actually it is a kind of absence of the object, of meaning, that they stage."[326]

The term interest or fascination which Barthes uses as a starting point becomes insufficient (inadequate) very quickly because it is neither specific nor affective enough. In Barthes' view being interested in something is an expression of a culturally determined intellectual attitude rather than the result of a genuine feeling. In this sense it is the 'objective' and culturally significant information of photographic images that draws our attention to them. It is a form of liking Barthes calls a 'general, polite interest', which originates from an "average affect, almost from a certain training."[327] Therefore, one can assume that every photograph is interesting in one way or the other because every photograph contains some information about the depicted object.

In contrast, the feeling that Barthes has in mind as guide for his inquiry is much stronger, raw and uncivilised than the 'tamed' affect of a political, personal or artistic interest. That also includes the shock-photograph which is unable to evoke more than a certain culturally determined 'empathy' without really 'hurting' the viewer. In most cases the traumatic character of the huge number of images of wars, natural disasters, famines, accidents etc. cannot bridge the emotional distance to their viewers, even if in some cases they might motivate people to

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[323] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.
[324] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 8.
[325] See for example Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 7-8
[326] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 130. For an elaborate and innovative anthropological discussion of the function of children's 'blankies' see Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären I: Blasen*, chapter 5.
[327] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26.

try to 'help' (e.g. donate money, supporting political petitions etc). For Barthes it is about the difference between interest and love.[328]

In Barthes' view the term 'love' is much more accurate for expressing the actual core of this feeling through which the photograph starts to 'exist', because it contains a number of heterogeneous elements which exceed by far the 'unitary' and generally coded interest.[329] Like the love for another person, the 'love' for a photograph always carries a certain risk of becoming disillusioned, rejected, hurt and confronted with one's own image. Therefore approaching photographs in this way has always something of a love-adventure. "So it seemed that the best word to designate (temporarily) the attraction certain photographs exerted upon me was *advenience* or even *adventure*. This picture *advenes*, that one doesn't."[330] While the interest always refers to certain positive, determinable qualities of the photograph, the 'love' for it is based on something that cannot properly be expressed, which is also why the 'injury' caused by such a specific image can not be compensated for in words. "[I]nstead of following the path of a formal ontology (of a logic), I stopped, keeping with me, like a treasure, my desire or my grief; (...) As *Spectator* I was interested in Photography only for 'sentimental' reasons; I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound:"[331] The term love is indeed like a red thread which runs through the two 'books' of *Camera Lucida*, although only a literal interpretation will understand this term as a relapse in an antiquated and obsolete humanism. In Barthes' own view this concept is an attempt to include in the 20th century phenomenologies (especially Sartre's and Husserl's) the emotional side of desire and mourning.

The great merit of Barthes' late texts lies in the fact that he invested a number of hackneyed and humanist terms with a new meaning in a different context.[332] In *Camera Lucida* two of these terms which are usually ignored by the academic discourses on photography become rehabilitated, viz. love and the family-portrait. Like 'love' the family-portrait is usually seen as being too banal and straightforward to become the subject of a serious investigation.[333]

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[328] I am interested in them (as I am interested in the world), I do not love them. (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 41.)

[329] Barthes introduces here a differentiation similar to the one in his 'text-theory'. The reader who faithfully follows the text, its intention and the motifs of the author can only consume it instead of 'writing' it anew by making the reading become part of the 'play of signifiers'.

[330] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 19.

[331] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 21.

[332] In the same way *A lover's Discourse* for example is not the rehabilitation or eulogy of a 'heroic' feeling but a vivid performance of the fragmented, de-centred, and largely unconscious and discoursive nature of that which we usually call 'love'.

[333] There are exceptions from this of which the first one was Pierre Bourdieu's sociological study from the mid-sixties about the function of the family-portrait. Understanding the importance of the family-portrait as a telling witness for people's self-perception (e.g. of their class, gender, ethnicity, race etc.) has become a standard feature of many critical anthologies of contemporary photography. A similar trend is visible in post-modern art-

Barthes' decision to use 'love' as the red-thread for his inquiry becomes also understandable if one reads the (auto-) biographical statements of both contemporary and classic photographers. In about ninety per cent of all cases the operatores are driven by a diffuse, yet overwhelmingly strong love for photography.[334] Therefore one could ask: Why should the viewer not prefer to access photographic images on an emotional level instead of being limited to a formal or academic interest in the aesthetical, art-historical, sociological, technical and political elements of photography?

In the end *Camera Lucida* does not try to decide which of these various approaches has got the greater heuristic value, which is why it is important to understand Barthes' critical annotations on this subject as a warning for readers who still have got his semiological approach in mind and might expect a similar methodology in *Camera Lucida*. Hence it is no wonder that *Camera Lucida* offers no rational explanations for this change of attitude and its deeper meaning. In this sense *Camera Lucida* is yet another fine example of Barthes denial to adhere to the requirements of scientific rationality. Furthermore he does not feel obliged to justify this lack, which is a similar attitude one can sense in *The Pleasure of the Text* where he attempts to not subscribe to any of the various 'languages of critique'. At the beginning of *The Pleasure of the Text* Barthes asks us to imagine someone who is able to encompass a plurality of contradictory languages and let them exist in him or herself without trying to synthesise them. He then concludes that "(s)uch a man would be the mockery of our society: court, school, asylum, polite conversation would cast him out: who endures contradiction without shame?"[335] Yet, such an impossible subject starts to exist the moment when the reader of a text enters the sphere of bliss. Something very similar happens when we look at photographs which evoke the love or injury Barthes spoke of. It is a moment when all cultural knowledge fails. "I am a primitive, a child - or a maniac; I dismiss all knowledge, all culture, I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own."[336] In this context it also seems possible to understand the anthropological experiment that Barthes has frequently mentioned, which is about a remote, ancient African tribe watching for the first time a movie, viz. a short scene filmed in their village. These 'savages', up until then unacquainted with cinematography were unable to 'see' anything else than "the chicken which, in one corner of the screen, crossed the village square. One could say: The chicken looked at them."[337]

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photography, where the family-portrait has the status of a very complex image which can be explored artistically in infinite ways.

[334] See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 9.

[335] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 3.

[336] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.

[337] Barthes, "Auge in Auge." *Der Entgegenkommende und der Stumpfe Sinn*, 317. [my translation]

6.5 Studying and Piercing

Barthes' attempt to find a real and physical (materialistic) analogy for the rather abstract phenomenological concept 'love' (liking, injury) leads into territory that remains vague and ambiguous. All the photographs which exist for him are marked by a certain duality, caused by the co-existence of two heterogeneous and contrasting elements, which cannot be reduced to a common aesthetic principle. The co-existence of these elements though, has got less the character of a 'peaceful' harmony than that of a violent and 'cutting' rivalry. By trying to give these elements a systematic name Barthes finds himself forced to look for more adequate concepts in Latin, because of the large ethymological comprehensiveness of many of its terms which are more useful to express the link between the emotional and the materialistic elements in photographs. This is also the reason why the term 'detail' proves to be inadequate because it refers almost exclusively to the depicted objects and not to their emotional side.

The terms Barthes 'borrows' from Latin to name the two antagonistic elements of photographs are *studium* and *punctum*.[338] In my view this is another example of Barthes' mastery in extending the meaning of previously used ideas and concepts by giving them new 'names' and transferring them to a new context.[339] In this sense one could formulate that *studium* and *punctum* are analogous to his structuralist concept of the connoted and denoted meaning of photographs. The difference though is that in *Camera Lucida* Barthes is not attempting anymore to create a systematic of the connotations (the field of the *studium*) but instead to enhance the self-reflective and phenomenological understanding of the denotation, the literal real or the *punctum*.

Generally speaking the element (sphere) which Barthes calls *studium* is analogous to the connotations of the photographic message and therefore able to evoke his aesthetical, political and sociological interest. In this sense the Latin term *studium* means the (academic) study of the photograph's content which does not necessarily require a special emotional involvement. "The studium is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: (...) The studium is of the order of liking, not of loving; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one

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The reference to Lacan's concept of the gaze as 'object a' is stated by Barthes in the preceding fragments. It is another reminder of that little adventure Lacan experienced when being on the 'fishing-trip' with Petit Jean: "*You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!* (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 95.)

[338] Meanwhile these two terms are standard concepts in the vocabulary of critics, curators, photographers and art-historians.

[339] Although for some scholars this represents only a new package for outdated and ineffective theories to make them again look fashionable.

takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds 'all right'."[340] The *studium* also comprises the photographer's intentions expressed through the artistic style and the meaning of the depicted objects. The *studium* is also that field which contains the categories and genre that constitute the art-historical canon.

One could say, therefore, that approaching photography through the *studium* is always mediated by a whole range of cultural filters. Instead of experiencing the photograph in its pure state, the *studium* allows the viewer to encounter only its culturally useful qualities. Hence Barthes' expression of the tamed photograph which has lost its potential 'dangerousness'. This attitude of the spectator has got its analogy on the side of the operator in the attempt to make the photograph easily understandable through a set of various photographic techniques (functions).[341] One of the purposes is to hide the fact that, in a certain way, photography is totally banal, in the sense that it is first of all just a witness of a past moment of reality.

Regardless of its content every photograph contains to some extent a *studium*, because its production and its perception are always culturally determined. It is of no importance whether the intentions of the photographer and of the viewers coincide because the only important fact is that the photograph has got a specific meaning which exceeds the pure denotative depiction. The concept of the *studium* cannot be understood by referring to specific objects, because it comprises all possible readings and interpretations which have their origin in our cultural knowledge. That also explains why often abstract and non-representational photographs contain a large *studium*. Despite their abstract character they convey an unambiguous and uniform message, which Barthes has counted to the 'photographic function' of the surprise (the rareness, the technical alteration). Or to say this in another Barthesian formulation, the photographer *purposely* tried to invest the sphere of the *studium* with the appearance of contingency, of un-codedness or of the *punctum*.

In order to explore the meaning of the counter-part of the *studium* in more detail, it will prove helpful not only to keep in mind its terminological affinity with Barthes' structuralist concept of the denotation, but also to draw parallels between the *punctum* and the essential differentiation between pleasure and bliss in *The Pleasure of the Text*. It is self-evident that the aim is not to reduce these different texts and themes to one generic principle but instead to

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[340] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

[341] Barthes speaks about the following photographic 'performances' which all have the function to surprise the spectator in specific culturally pre-determined ways: 1) the rareness of the referent (object); 2) 'freezing' a pose in a significant moment; 3) inventing new photographic techniques; 4) altering the depicted things and objects through a number of technical 'tricks'; 5) the originality of the photographic situation. (See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 43.)

open them to a more inclusive understanding. Therefore the meaning of these rather associative connections is not to show that Barthes has always had the same ideas and that his writing was always concerned with the same concepts, but to emphasise the impossibility of sufficiently determining the physical reactions which Barthes calls bliss in text or 'love' in photography. He has just added another dimension to the existing 'vocabulary' without attempting to come to a definite closure.

The sphere of the *punctum* is marked by a similar vagueness and ambiguity as the relationship between the *studium* and the depicted objects. As we have seen, the term 'detail' is somehow misleading because it necessarily implies the determinability of the respective object or thing. A photographic detail is always a detail of something and as such plays a part in identifying the respective object. In contrast Barthes' phenomenological reflection on his feelings and emotions evoked by the *punctum* of the photograph lead to the awareness that most often this 'detail' is insignificant and perhaps even indeterminable. Neither its formal (morphological) meanings nor its ideological (mythological) messages are able to evoke that 'injury' which pierces the interested or academic study of a photograph. The etymological and syntactical richness of the term *punctum* enables Barthes to express that very specific affect.

> A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: (...) This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole - and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).[342]

Thus its essential quality is that it disrupts the reading and interpretation of the photograph governed by the *studium* without trying to give it a definite meaning. One could paradoxically say that the sense of the *punctum* is its non-sense, its ability to bring to a halt all cultural codes. This concept of a 'lack of sense' can be found in slightly altered ways in almost all of Barthes' post-structuralist texts. In his understanding it is closely related to the term 'Satori' which is an important concept in Zen that he also describes as "blank which erases in us the reign of the Codes," as "a panic suspension of language," or as "the breach of that internal recitation which constitutes our person."[343] The literary expression of the Satori is the haiku which is a constant point of reference for the late Barthes (since his book on Japan *Empire of Signs*). The haiku is a poem-like three liner which describes a 'banal' everyday event without producing any rational sense, viz. neither a deeper symbolic sense nor a sense that would

[342] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26-7.
[343] Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 75.

originate from telling something unusual.[344] The haiku does not describe or define anything, its only 'meaning' is the performance of a brief gesture, a momentary allusion to something that in itself has no permanent existence. It is not the represented thing, object or scene but only the moment of the expression itself that is represented by the Haiku. "Neither describing nor defining, the haiku (...) diminishes to the point of pure and sole designation. *It's that, it's thus*, says the haiku, *it's so*. Or better still: *so!* it says, with a touch so instantaneous and so brief (...) that even the copula would seem excessive."[345] One could also formulate that it is a sign whose signifiers have no corresponding signified and which therefore fulfil one of the basic principles in Zen, to carry out every activity only for its own sake and not in order to pursue something different from that activity. 'When you walk, be content to walk', Barthes quotes a master of Zen and in the same sense one could say about the haiku: 'Written for the sake of writing' and not to express something different from the linguistic signs.

I think we should now begin to refer Barthes' 'flirt' with Japanese culture back to photography. There is a remarkable passage from *Empire of Signs* where he attempts to explain the haiku's pure referential character through a comparison with photography.

> Here meaning is only a flash, a slash of light: (...) but the haiku's flash illumines, reveals nothing; it is the flash of a photograph one takes very carefully (in the Japanese manner) but having neglected to load the camera with film. Or again: haiku reproduces the designating gesture of the child pointing at whatever it is (...), merely saying: *that!*[346]

Exactly the same child-like gesture we find in photographs which are able to make its viewers exclaim: 'That there!', without producing any further sense. There are two important passages in *Camera Lucida* where Barthes discusses this most basic and essential function of the photograph. Right at the beginning he writes: "(T)he photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'Look', 'See', 'Here it is'; it points a finger at a certain *vis-à-vis*, and cannot escape

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[344] Some examples of haikus that Barthes quotes are:
In the fisherman's house
The smell of dried fish
And hear
-
The winter wind blows.
The cat's eyes
Blink
-
The old pond:
A frog jumps in:
Oh! the sound of the water.
(quoted in Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 71 and 82.)

[345] Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 83.

[346] Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 83.

this pure deictic language."[347] At the end of the book after he has explored the essential connection between photography and death with regard to the family photos of his mother, he writes: "Hence I was leafing through the photographs of my mother according to an initiatic path which led me to that cry, the end of all language: 'There she is!' (...) a sudden awakening, outside of 'likeness', a *satori* in which words fail, the rare, perhaps unique evidence of the 'So, yes, so much and no more'."[348] Interestingly we find exactly the same words in *The Pleasure of the Text* in a passage, where Barthes tries to describe that crucial moment where a text reaches the limit of its readability and therefore bears the possibility for 'pleasure' turning into 'bliss'.[349]

Barthes' statement that the *punctum* is that part of a photograph where its structured and coded viewing is interrupted, suggests that it is misleading to call the *punctum* a part, element or detail of the photograph because it can fill the whole frame (as the 'winter garden photograph' shows).[350] Phenomenologically speaking this is the moment when the photograph as such ceases to exist because its main function is then to prove that the depicted object existed at a certain past moment.[351] To further understand the concept of the *punctum* we have to ask for its specific qualities that can disrupt and transgress the codified meaning of photographs which leads us to the second book of *Camera Lucida*.

At the end of the first book Barthes admits that he was unable to fully elaborate the essence of photography despite the consequent application of his phenomenological and 'hedonist' methodology. The various characterisations of the *punctum* are still too vague in order to draw conclusions about photography in general. One of the reasons is the fact that it is impossible to exactly determine the relationship between *studium* and *punctum*. In "The Photographic Message" Barthes mentions the difficulty that the sphere of pure denotations can (by definition) not be represented through language, which is why it is impossible to draw an exact line between denoted and connoted messages. This condition receives further affirmation through Barthes' characterisation of the *punctum* as indeterminable and

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[347] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 5.

[348] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 109.

[349] "*That's it!* This cry is not to be understood as an illumination of the intelligence, but as the very limit of nomination, of the imaginatio. (Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 45.)

[350] Barthes mentions two further photographs where the *punctum* fills the whole frame. One is Duane Michals' famous portrait of Andy Warhol where he hides his face behind his hands. Interestingly Barthes writes at the end of that passage that the *punctum* occupies the whole photograph "while remaining a 'detail'." (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 45.) In my view this paradox is another attempt by Barthes to abolish the strict differentiation between the content of an image and the 'content' of the viewer's mind. Even if the *punctum* is a detail only, it might still occupy the whole emotionality of the viewer which means in a phenomenological sense that the detail becomes the whole image and vice versa the whole photograph shrinks to the size of the *punctum*.

[351] See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6, where he writes: "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see."

unsystematic. What was once perceived as a methodological problem has now become the starting point for his inquiry. "(F)rom my Spectator's viewpoint, the detail is offered by chance and for nothing; the scene is in no way 'composed' according to a creative logic; (...) In order to perceive the punctum, no analysis would be of any use to me (but perhaps memory sometimes would, as we shall see)."[352] It is also important to notice that Barthes frequently mentions the impossibility of calling the dualism *studium-punctum* a photographic principle because not every photograph has got a *punctum* and, vice versa, sometimes the *punctum* completely overshadows any *studium*. The reason why the *punctum* is often missing in a photograph lies in the fact that it is an additional element put there by the viewer, although paradoxically there must also be a corresponding 'object' in the image. "Last thing about the *punctum*: whether or not it is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*."[353]

One of the functions of the *punctum* thus is the deconstruction of photographic categories which do not consider the image's accidental character. Yet it would be wrong to assign it the status of a structural constant for two reasons, of which one has already been mentioned. It is the fact that many photographs do not have a *punctum* at all, or also what is one viewer's *punctum* might be another's *studium*. A second reason lies in the contradictory nature of the attempt to consciously search for the *punctum* since one of its basic qualities is that it accidentally and unconsciously pierces or injures our feelings. Therefore it is important to be very wary of the fact, that in a lot of comments, essays and reviews on contemporary photographic works, the concept of the *punctum* has been granted an unjustifiable heuristic value.

Even though in *Camera Lucida* Barthes analyses a number of images in terms of their *studium* and *punctum*, he makes unmistakably clear that his comments are in no way objective and generally valid judgements of the respective photographs and their producers. Instead what he tries to convey is a phenomenological sense of his personal affectedness by certain images. This affectedness which appears as love and compassion does not mean that the photographs fulfil Barthes' artistic taste but it shows their ability to trigger in him the desire (need) for a search for his self. An old image ("Alhambra" 1855), taken by Charles Clifford is one such example.

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[352] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 42-3.

[353] Barthes, Camera Lucida, 55.

In this quote Barthes raises two very important questions which directly refer to an aesthetics that considers photography to be an art-form. In my view the expression 'what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there' is quite similar to that almost cliché-like statement that 'art originates in the eye of the beholder'.

> An old house, a shadowy porch, tiles, a crumbling Arab decoration, a man sitting against the wall, a deserted street, a Mediterranean tree (...) this old photograph (...) touches me: it is quite simply there that I should like to live. This desire affects me at a depth and according to roots which I do not know: warmth of the climate? Mediterranean myth? Apollinism? Defection? Withdrawal? Anonymity? Nobility? Whatever the case (with regard to myself, my motives, my fantasy), I want to live there.[354]

This is yet another bold example of the fact that Barthes' concept *punctum* is not a measure of artistic taste or skill but the 'silent' attempt to name something which deeply affects us *without* being accessible to language.

The difficulty in determining an image's *punctum* might also be an effect of its unconscious elements which do not comply with our rational ideas of linear temporality and causality.[355] In regard to the temporal factor Barthes concludes that the 'perception' of the *punctum* is often marked by a distinctive moment of delay, which is why in order to 'read' a photograph, memory has got an advantage over analysis. This is a similar dynamics that is at work in that moment when the 'pleasure' of reading a text turns into 'bliss'. The 'bliss' evoked by a text does not need to have a muscular, tense or phallic 'gestalt' but instead can be shapeless, and it is most likely to come about when the reading is interrupted, e.g. by looking up from the text and letting the thoughts 'wander', which Barthes describes as a 'letting-oneself-drift.[356]

Similar to this concept the 'love' evoked by a photograph does not have its roots in the rational scanning of the image, but in a specific latency and disruption of the viewing-process which allows the *punctum* to take effect.

> Ultimately - or at the limit - in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes. (...) Absolute subjectivity is achieved only in a state, an effort, of silence (shutting your eyes is to make the image speak in silence). The photograph touches me if I withdraw it from its usual blah-blah: (...) to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness.[357]

The only difference is that Barthes' formulation emphasises the material side of the photographic experience, viz. in the sense that the subjective (emotional) moment is always linked to a material aspect of the depicted object

[354] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 38.

[355] In regard to this specific topic Barthes writes elsewhere: "The effect is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign, its name; it is sharp and yet lands in a vague zone of myself;" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 52-3.)

[356] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 18 and 24-5.

[357] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 54-5.

6.6 'That Has Been'.

We should now discuss Barthes' changed methodology in the second book of *Camera Lucida*, because everything he has said so far about the love for certain photographs has not been specific enough to define the essential element of the *punctum* which is responsible for the viewer's emotional injury. In the course of resolving this problem it might also be possible to better understand the kind of compassion which Barthes has frequently used as a synonym for the concepts 'to like' and 'to love'. In anticipation of the result of this section one can say that the second book emphasises the flip-side of the hedonistic leitmotif 'love', i.e. death and its function to impose a temporal limit on everything that exists. The change in attitude is also the reason why *Camera Lucida* has often been called a novel. In contrast to the first part, the second book has a sad and sometimes gloomy note and if one believes in 'metaphysics' one might even read it as Barthes' fatalistic anticipation of his own tragic death, which occurred only months after the publication of *Camera Lucida*.[358]

The red thread in his search for the *punctum's* meaning does not only comprise the careful 'reading' of a number of more or less famous photographs from the history of photography (e.g. Kertesz, Avedon, Klein, Nadar, Stieglitz, Hine) but also the family portraits of his recently deceased mother. Leafing through the large number of images of his mother, Barthes is struck by one that stands out despite the fact that it is only an amateur photograph, showing his mother when she was five years old together with her seven year old brother in their parents' winter garden. What distinguishes this photograph from all others is the fact that it is the only one that reflects the 'truth' of his mother's personality; a truth which Barthes also describes as the condition of an individual "in its essence, 'as into itself ...' beyond simple resemblance."[359] This also concerns the important difference in portrait photography between an image resembling a person and expressing a person's inner character. Resemblance clearly belongs to the sphere of the *studium* because it is a measure for the likeness of the shape or 'gestalt' between model and image. In contrast the expression or 'truth' is something which refers to the invisible, 'inner' sphere of the individual, or in Barthes' antiquated term to the soul of the photographed person.

So far, one could object, nothing essentially new has been said about the *punctum* because the truth of the expression is again a synonym for the Satori, " (...) the end of all language: 'There

[358] See for example Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 93 where he writes that "(t)he only 'thought' I can have is that at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed; between the two, nothing more than waiting." See also Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 72 and 75.

[359] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 107.

she is!' (...) 'So, yes, so much and no more'."[360] Yet, there is another meaning to the winter garden photograph because it also symbolises the relationship between photography and time and thus implicitly photography's reference to death. In order to come closer to an understanding of this complex and abstract connection Barthes puts the winter garden photograph in context with an image that was taken in 1865 by Alexander Gardner showing the young Lewis Paynes on death row. The young man is shown sitting on his bed, leaning against the wall of his cell, waiting for his execution to come. This means that in the photograph he is still alive and yet, from our present perspective he is already dead. For Barthes this allegorical photograph ('waiting for death') is showing us a situation that is a general and essential moment of every photographic image. "In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe."[361]

A photograph is this catastrophe because of its unique ability to be an absolute witness of a past moment of reality. In order to appear on a photographic image the depicted object or person had to be there, it had to exist at the moment when the photo was taken, and it is exactly this condition which is the cause for Barthes' pain when he looks at the winter garden photograph. This particular image of his mother makes him irrevocably aware of the fact that photographs are unable to preserve life because their only message is the future past. In a literal sense photographs do not re-present anything because their sole ability is to affirm that the depicted object or person did exist at a certain moment in the past. Ontologically speaking photographs do not refer to that which does not exist anymore, but to that which did once exist. This is a very subtle yet essential differentiation which lets us understand the impossibility of conserving the passing present. Photography is always an anticipated death which continuously confronts us with the metaphysical question: "(W)hy is it that I am alive *here and now*?"[362]

After this excursus into the flip-side of photography's moments of love, compassion and injury, Barthes attempts another and more inclusive characterisation of the *punctum*, where he not only considers the random element or detail but also its unusual temporality. "This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (*'that-has-been'*), its pure representation."[363] If we now return to the winter garden-

[360] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 109.
[361] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.
[362] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 84.
[363] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

photograph it seems possible to understand why this specific image has such a drastic impact on Barthes. For him it represents one of the rare cases where a photograph comprises both elements of the *punctum* because it captured the 'expression' of his mother (the 'truth' of her personality) as well as the irrefutable evidence, that on the day the picture was taken she was there, existed, lived. Now she is dead, but this fact does not diminish the testimonial power of the photograph. Yet, and this is Barthes' painful 'injury', the photograph is unable to offer anything else than this rather banal and obvious confirmation: The past (the mother) is not coming alive again.

It is a noteworthy fact that Barthes did not include the winter garden image in his collection of photographs shown in *Camera Lucida*. Although it plays such an important role it is withheld from us readers for the reason that it exists only for him. For us, Barthes writes, it would just be one of the many trivial examples from the genre 'family-portrait'. At best it could be interesting for our historical *studium* since it is a very old photograph "but in it, for you, no wound."[364] In order to save his mother from our 'ignorance' he substitutes her image for a famous portrait of the mother of the Parisian 'high-society' photographer Nadar (taken in 1853). This photograph does express the truth and the finitude of a mother's existence on a general level, whereas the winter garden image is able to do this for Barthes only .

Jacques Derrida pointed out another way of understanding the absence of the winter garden photograph. In his obituary text for Barthes he describes this strategically important image as the *punctum* of 'Camera Lucida' in the sense that it is that detail, scratch, rift, fissure or unconscious element of the text which disrupts its systematic reading.

> The Winter Garden Photograph: the invisible *punctum* of the book. It doesn't belong to the corpus of photographs he exhibits, to the series of examples he displays and analyzes. Yet it irradiates the entire book. (...) The radiance composes with the wound that signs the book, with an invisible *punctum*.[365]

The importance of Derrida's suggestive interpretation is his emphasis of the *punctum's* general in-determinability and invisibility. The trigger of the emotional response does not have to have a corresponding element in the image as such because the *punctum* functions as a sign for a lack or absence which is especially true in regard to its temporal meaning, i.e. the past moment that is captured by the image.

Ending our analysis of *Camera Lucida* at this point does not mean that 'there is nothing else to say' and that we are now in possession of a rational and coherent theory of photography. As

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[364] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 73.

[365] Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes." *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau-Ponty.* Edited by Hugh J. Silverman, 269.

we have seen, Barthes frequently emphasised that every such theory, including his own structuralist approach, is doomed to misunderstand photography's noeme, despite its obvious simplicity. "The *noeme* of Photography is simple, banal; no depth: 'that has been.' What! A whole book (even a short one) to discover something I know at first glance? Yes, but such evidence can be a sibling of madness."[366] The importance of this concept can be measured by the fact that the majority of photographs seem to be the product of the intention to disguise this basic condition. Barthes characterises these images as lively, interesting, shocking, aesthetically pleasing etc. and it is obvious that they are suggesting that the meaning (noeme, essence) of photography is the truthful and realistic depiction of an object, instead of witnessing a moment of the past. Keeping this difference in mind will be helpful for the following discussion of the works of a number of contemporary, post-modern photographers.

[366] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 115.

Part IV

Chapter 7

Postmodern Elements in Contemporary Art-Photography

This chapter has the purpose of putting the theoretical approaches discussed so far in context with contemporary (art-) photography. It is important to be aware of the fact that the analysis of the concrete photographic works can not be carried out by exclusively referring to one of the respective authors. Even though such procedure appears to be formally coherent and elegant, it would go against the basic 'results' of the texts discussed so far.[367] The meaning or sense of the photographs in question is always made up of a complex aggregate of heterogeneous elements which can be uncoded only through an interdisciplinary approach. For example, one can understand Barbara Kruger's photographs not only on the basis of feminist theory but also by using Foucault's concept of power, Barthes' critique of the origin of modern myths and Derrida's deconstruction of the oppositions 'nature and culture'.[368]
Because the aim of the following discussion is to evaluate the role of post-structuralist theory for a critical understanding of contemporary (art-) photography, two other discourses which have photography as their subject matter, will play only a minor role: viz. the art-historical analysis and the canon of photographic masters in the history of photography. Therefore, one of the purposes of the previous chapters was to find theoretical approaches for a critique and interpretation of those spheres in contemporary photography, which are inaccessible to art-historical analyses and photography-historical systematic. One consequence of this condition is that, from an art-historical point of view, the selection of photographers and their respective works might appear eclectic. To defend my approach I could argue that presenting the 'masters' of postmodern photography in order to analyse their works and to represent the founding principles and structures of postmodernity would be a relapse into the times of a 'heroic' modernity, which is unable to let go of antiquated concepts such as 'progress', 'mastery' and 'control'.[369]

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[367] I am referring here to the impossibility of a closure of any interpretation of an image or text.
[368] See for example Kruger's exhibition *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture* (1982), where she attempts to uncover the power-structures of human behaviour that is considered to be naturally male and female. Kruger's work is driven by the conviction that the term nature is not natural itself but like any other linguistic expression determined by a set of conventions.
[369] I am referring especially to the art-movements Dada, Bauhaus, Surrealism, and Neue Sachlichkeit which originated during the interregnum of the two world wars. Peter Sloterdijk writes about this with great clarity:

In the history of photography names like Man Ray, Laslo Moholy-Nagy, August Sander, Henry Cartier-Bresson, Robert Cappa, Bill Brandt, Alfred Stieglitz, Ansel Adams, Irving Penn, Garry Winogrand etc. are always associated with the foundation of a specific school, style or paradigm. The art-historical discourse that transforms these photographers into masters is generally based on concepts such as authority, representation, originality, intentionality, truth and the strict differentiation between art and mass-culture. For example, one important issue of the dispute between modernist and postmodernist aesthetics concerns the concept of abstractness. At the beginning of this century modernist photography abandoned representationalism to some extent although the claim to depict some kind of 'truth', which was formerly located in the realistic depiction, continued to be one of its basic principles, viz. by referring to a metaphysical or idealist 'essence' of the abstract depiction, which is accessible only to the 'master-photographer'.[370] The fact that this photographic approach was criticised only a few years later by the apologists of the Straight Photography, Neue Sachlichkeit and Realism is another indication that, in the end, it would become inevitable to allow the term 'photographic truth' take on a pluralist meaning or to abandon it completely. Therefore instead of assuming a mimetic relationship between reality and its photographic representation it seems more appropriate to think of it in terms of exchangeable simulacra.

The relationship between modernist and postmodernist aesthetics will be a recurring topic in the following pages, although I am not intending to discuss the problem of a definite delimitation between the two in any detail. This would afford a philosophical debate that is

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> Weimar art cynics train themselves to play masters of the situation, while the situation in fact is one in which things have gotten out of control and sovereignty is no longer possible. They practice elevating themselves above the absurd, the inconceivable, and above what has long since been seen through. They impudently place their poses against the equally overwhelming and mediocre destiny of the period: cynically allowing themselves to be swept along – Hey, we're alive. The modernization of unhappy consciousness. (Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 386.)

[370] If one takes a closer look at the autobiographical statements of the (master-) photographers it becomes apparent that it is the museum, art-market, art-history and art-school which produce and define the various schools and their main-representatives. (See Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper (eds.), *Dialogue with Photography*). This is also an example of the way avant-garde movements lose their subversive potential as soon as they become institutionalised and commercialised.

Paul Theroux's *Picture Palace* represents an intelligent 'translation' of this critique into the language of the novel. The narrator describes her rise to be a famous and much sought-after portrait-photographer *against* her own will and despite her openly critical attitude towards the art-establishment:

> I avoided photographic circles, and while students of photography gathered in 'schools', their very bowels yearning for 'movements', I had grown to loathe the cliques and seen them as nests of thuggish committee men, shabby and unconfident mobsters of the art world whoring after historians and critics. (...) The movement – so frequent in the half-arts – implies a gang mentality; it is the half-artist's response to his inadequacy. (Paul Theroux, *Picture Palace*, 167.)

beyond the scope of this study.[371] Instead I am taking sides with a position which the photographic critic William Wilson describes in the following way: "Since modernism and postmodernism are overlapping, but discontinuous, and the essence of postmodern is that it has no essence and must seek no essences, to define modernism and postmodernism as mutually exclusive is an inappropriate vestige of a leftover modernism."[372] For the same reason one can also understand why the arguments of the guardians of modernity necessarily miss their target. There is no doubt that postmodern aesthetics is an arbitrary mixture of elements, 'borrowed' from past styles and schools, that often reaches far beyond modernity. Therefore one could say that one of the genuine moments of postmodern aesthetics is the way it recycles and assembles what it 'steals' from other epochs.

The critical approach of modernist photography from the first third of the twentieth century, was largely determined by the search for new means to express an aesthetics that would be able to mirror the rapid and formerly unknown pace of the social, political and economic changes of the times. In this sense the photography of the Neue Sachlichkeit and Bauhaus developed a 'technical' photo-aesthetics that matched the progressing mechanisation of the economy. One of its main characteristics is the realistic and detailed presentation of the depicted objects (machines, tools, means of transport etc.) which, on an abstract level, includes the photogramms of photographers like Man Ray and Laslo Moholy-Nagy.[373] Despite the critical attitude of these photographs, which is expressed through feelings of fear, coldness and powerlessness in the face of an apparently unrestrained acceleration of the processes of production and transport in modern capitalism, they are also proof of a significant interest and cynical fascination about the depicted objects on the photographer's side.[374]

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[371] For an overview of the relation between modernist and postmodernist photographic aesthetics see the first chapter of Joseph Inguanti's *Postmodern Photography in America: Advertising and Politics*. For a less art-historical but more philosophically orientated approach on this theme see William S. Wilson, "And/Or. One or the Other, or Both". *Sequence (con) Sequence. (sub) Versions of Photography in the 80s*. Edited by Julia Ballerini.

[372] Wilson, "And/Or. One or the Other, or Both." *Sequence (con) Sequence. (sub) Versions of Photography in the 80s*. Edited by Julia Ballerini. 15.

[373] The photogramm's representation of 'technical progress' is a direct result of the way it is produced. The 'depicted' object leaves its trace unmediated on the light-sensitive material instead of being the 'reflector' of light rays which produce the image on the back of the photo-camera. Because of their perfect symmetrical shape one has to notice that most of the objects in these photogramms from the nineteen twenties and thirties give us the impression of tools made of metal that do not resemble anything organic or natural.

[374] For an elaborate discussion of the concept cynical fascination see Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*.

7.1 Richard Misrach

Even though the photographs of the American photographer Richard Misrach also convey a strong technology-critique (meanwhile in the nuclear age) they are able to avoid the immediate aesthetical spell which is such a 'seductive' element of the increasingly complex human-made machines and technologies. Misrach's photographs of former nuclear test sites in the deserts of the American West express a much more sophisticated distance between him and the objects of his 'inquiry' than the vertical perspectives, serial close-up shots, abstract photogramms and often overtly emphasised black and white contrasts in the images of his modernist predecessors. One of the main characteristics of his colour images, taken with a large-format plate-camera, lies in the fact that they do not show the 'lethal' objects (e.g. the bomb, the mushroom cloud, the jet of flame of the rocket propulsion etc.) but only the almost invisible traces and remnants of the deserted test and research sites. They are images of a 'shocking' beauty and sublimity which comprise the painterly rules of composition and the technical perfection of American landscape photography (in the style of Ansel Adams and Edward Weston) as well as the critical attitude of contemporary photojournalism and documentarism.

The contradictory and paradoxical combination of these two genre produces a new aesthetics even though its elements are both taken from the modernist tradition. In the photo-canto *The War (Bravo 20)*[375] Misrach attempts not only to bring to awareness the disastrous after-effects of these technologies, he is also implicitly criticising traditional photographic practices and the way they produce meaning and represent 'reality'.

> The very act of representation has been so thoroughly challenged in recent years by postmodern theories that it is impossible not to see the flaws everywhere, in any practice of photography. Traditional genres in particular - journalism, documentary studies, and fine-art photography - have become shells, or forms emptied of meaning.[376]

Through his hyper-aestheticised images Misrach evokes interest for a political and ecological problem which would otherwise pass unnoticed as part of the daily mass of images of human suffering and ecological catastrophes. His 'aesthetics of mass destruction' also implies a critique of the presumably apolitical nature of landscape photography and the aesthetic-less

[375] Misrach uses the term 'photo-canto' to express the fact that his different photographic works are variations on the same theme, viz. the disturbance of nature's equilibrium through the development and use of uncontrollable (war-) technology.

[376] Misrach, *Violent Legacies*, 90.

presentation of the journalistic photograph.[377] Misrach counters allegations that he is exploiting serious themes such as mass-killings, destruction of the environment and social violence by pointing out that his way of indirectly presenting the destructive forces in question strongly appeals to the political conscience of the viewer because of the images' disturbing contrast between beauty (life) and chaos (death). "Probably the strongest criticism levelled at my work is that I'm making 'poetry of the holocaust'. But I've come to believe that beauty can be a very powerful conveyor of difficult ideas. It engages people when they might otherwise look away."[378]

The displacement and change of context leads to the typical postmodern shift of meaning despite his images' obvious connection to a number of modernist photographic genre. Generally speaking one could formulate that questioning the boundaries between established schools, styles and fashions is a common practise in postmodern photography, because it exposes their culturally conditioned structure. Landscape photography which is usually perceived of as being apolitical and devoid of social power structures, is a good example of the fact that this seemingly neutral sphere of visual perception is strongly affected by a number of social-political factors as well. Meaghan Morris writes about this topic in a comment on a photo-series by the Australian photographer Lynn Silvermann, who chose only two different views (perspectives) for the images she took during a 'walkabout' through the South Australian desert: viz. the few square metres just in front of her feet and the panoramic view of the horizon where the sky fills four fifth of the whole image.

> Desert descriptions can never be seen as innocent of cultural reference. 'The desert' is always a pre-existing pile of texts and documents, fantasies, legends, jokes and other people's memories, a vast imaginary hinterland (...) The myth of the inland precedes any deliberate act of seeing it with one's own eyes. In this, no doubt, it is like any other tourist attraction; the myth motivates and structures the visitor's vision of the land.[379]

Since all of Misrach's photographs are marked by a certain indirectness of the way they depict their actual subject (except for the Canto "The Pit"), one could also understand them as metaphors for the covert operations of the military secret-service. For example, in the Canto "Project W-47 (The Secret)" Misrach presents us with images of the sparse and weathered

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[377] For an elaborated critique of the apolitical attitude in landscape photography see Deborah Bright, "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography." *Illuminations*. Edited by Liz Heron and Val Williams. 333-347.

[378] Misrach, *Violent Legacies*, 90.

[379] Meaghan Morris, "Two Types of Photography Criticism Located in Relation to Lynn Silverman's Series." *Illuminations*. Edited by Heron and Williams. 323 and 325.

remnants of a former military test site in the small desert town Wendover in Utah (figures 6-9). Although Wendover is only one of about three thousand test and research sites, it has special meaning because it was there that the nuclear bombs destined for Nagasaki and Hiroshima were finally completed, assembled and loaded onto the B-29 war planes. Even though this is over fifty years ago (and a large part of the history of the second world war has since been written) Misrach encountered unusual difficulties during the research for his project because he was denied access to important information he needed, which led him to a number of speculations about possible 'accidents' that might have happened all those years ago. However, whether the secrecy is just about internal differences between military departments or whether there is some truth in the rumour that a third bomb existed which got lost on its way to Japan, is only of minor importance because

> the details of Wendover are less important than what it symbolizes (...) The military takes over vast tracts of remote land as well as urban sites; it experiments with weapons of mass destruction; and it maintains secrecy in the name of national security, when in actuality it is trying to keep the public from finding out about dangerous and unjustifiable programs.[380]

The circumstances under which Misrach carried out his critical project are also a good illustration of another closely related theme that could best be described with the Foucauldian dictum 'seeing without being seen'. In no other governmental department than the military and its secret services, seeing and reconnoitre, spying and foreseeing, cartographing and surveying etc. are of such importance (e.g. the enemy's weapon arsenals, their number of troops and their movements etc.).[381] This (visual) knowledge largely contributes to the 'improvement' and 'humanisation' of warfare, such as a more effective destruction of the enemy's weapon arsenals, military bases and intelligence headquarters, reduction of civilian casualties, less use or loss of equipment. The stored visual information is also an important means to shape the public consciousness about a state's war politics. For example, more than any previous war, the Gulf war become an event of visual images taken by cameras installed in spy planes, fighter jets and laser-guided missiles, which were released only after strict editing by the

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[380] Misrach, *Violent Legacies*, 84.

[381] See Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 11-30.
A prominent example of this dynamics is one of this century's most famous and politically most effective photographs, taken in autumn 1962 by the crew of an American spy-plane that shows areas of a prohibited military area in Cuba. These images clearly proved that the observed troop movements were part of the installation of launching bases for Russian intermediate-range missiles. The evidence given by the photographs led to what is known as the 'Cuban-Crisis' between the USA and the Soviet Union. Only Kennedy's and Krustschev's diplomatic skills prevented the escalation of what could have become a third (and probably nuclear) world war at the peak of the cold war era.

military and political leadership.[382] What looked like a 'clean' and highly efficient conduct of well-aimed destruction, successfully avoided showing the widespread suffering it caused among the Iraqian civilians. Not surprisingly, the images of injured, starving and distressed civilians were used by the Iraqian government to create a hostile public opinion towards NATO.

Misrach's photographs of nuclear test sites clearly display an awareness of this kind of one-sidedness because they do not directly show the destruction and death that 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Man' caused when they exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Instead, his images refer to what Lyotard termed the non-representable or the sublime, viz. not only to the above mentioned sublime beauty of the desert that was abused through its use as a test site, but also to the sublime threat of this most powerful means of mass destruction. They remind us of one of the voices in Marguerite Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* who says to her counterpart again and again: You have seen nothing despite watching all the news reels and going to all the museums! This is what Misrach means when he states that journalism and documentary photography have become empty shells.

7.2 Jeff Jacobson

After Misrach's politically motivated, highly aestheticised and stylised colour photographs I would now like to discuss the images of another photo-documentarist which are also photographed in colour but, in contrast to Misrach's hyper-aesthetical perfectionism, have much more in common with the Street-photography of someone like Robert Frank, Gary Winogrand or Lee Friedlaender. The photographic style of Jeff Jacobson's *My Fellow Americans* is a chaotic compendium of garish colours, out of focus motifs, slanting perspectives, incomplete and unbalanced framing, and 'multiple-exposures', created through the combination of fill-flash and long exposure times. All these stylistic elements are not new as such (they have not been 'invented' by Jacobson), yet again, it is their unusual and paradoxical combination that creates the postmodern look. The titles of Jacobson's images provide us with information about the place, time and the general 'meaning' of the depicted situation and scene which is a standard feature of classical twentieth century photojournalism. He photographs mainly events and situations which are performed in and for the public and which are meant to convey a strong nationalism. His preferred photographic subjects are

[382] See Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place.*

presidential campaigns, strikes, demonstrations, Miss America competitions, football games, charity events, music festivals and religious gatherings of all sorts.

The most significant element in Jacobson's images is the incoherent and 'chaotic' aesthetics which lacks the signs of objectivity, realism, critique or the representation of the perspective of the uninvolved spectator (figures 10-12). The disregard for the standard rules of photojournalism is not the outcome of a conscious and rational decision but instead of a subjective, accidental and play-like attempt to free himself from the restrictions and requirements of the photographic tradition.

> I was just beginning to shoot colour film, and color made me nervous. I needed to loosen up and enjoy it. So I played! I let the shutter run, jiggled the camera, waved the thing all over the place. Another revelation! The traditional forms of photography weren't binding rules. (...) While shooting Jimmy Carter in a Cuban joint in Miami, I added strobe to the mix. (...) Combined with a long shutter speed, the strobe allowed me to glimpse not only the moment the subject was illuminated by the flash, but also the moments immediately before and after.[383]

It is very important to understand this playful handling of the camera and the resulting effects not as an end in itself. Jacobson's unorthodox approach towards the social-political everyday myths of the Americanised Western World is of course based on a number of other motives and attitudes. Although photographic technique always has a strong impact on the appearance of the depicted object, it is in combination with the inherent 'meaning' of that object that constitutes the message of the images.[384] Jacobson is very aware of the problem that photographic technique tends to become self-sufficient which is why he reminds us of the banal, yet inevitable premise of every photographic practise that the connection to the 'out there', the 'real', the 'object or thing' (no matter how 'diluted' or abstract) must not be abandoned. Otherwise it would not make sense to call the respective image a photograph. Reflecting on his technical repertory he writes that "(f)or a while this technique alone fascinated me, but I soon learned that the technique is only useful to the extent that the picture beneath it has meaning."[385]

In this context it is again helpful to refer to our discussion of Barthes' structuralist essays on photography. As we saw it is impossible to carry out his project with the required scientific

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[383] Jeff Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, second page of introduction, left column.

[384] As previously discussed, speaking of technique and depicted object as two isolated spheres is an artificial distinction which makes sense only insofar as it tells us something about their structural interconnectedness.

[385] Jeff Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, second page of introduction, left column.

and logical stringency for the reason that there are no criteria that allow us to establish a definite differentiation between connoted and denoted meaning. If we apply this to Jacobson's photographic style it should be clear why it is difficult to determine to what extent the effects of his photographs are due to his specific aesthetics. And yet, even though his photographs go against the conventions of traditional photojournalism that is presented to us in newspapers, TV, magazines etc., they still convey a strong sense of investigative documentarism. This is partly the result of his ability to see the periphery of a scene or event, and also his disregard for one of the basic principles of traditional photojournalism to catch the 'decisive moment' (a term coined by Henry Cartier-Bresson). Jacobson's decisive moments are not supposed to preserve grand poses or meaningful gestures but instead are aimed at a marginal 'in-between', that is usually thought to have no specific meaning. His photographs give us the impression that they were taken by someone who was consciously pointing the camera in the wrong direction, pressed the shutter always a little bit too early or too late and who did not take his images from the front row of journalists, but instead photographed his subjects from the perspective of the crowd of anonymous spectators. In connection with the long exposure time and the 'blurry' colours and contours, Jacobson produces pictures which have a strong subjective flair and therefore convey a different kind of journalistic merit.

> Whose truth is being presented in the photograph - that of the photographer or that of the world? (...) My photographs are not reality. They are a record of how I interpreted reality and how I formally arranged that interpretation in the frame at the moment of exposure. (...) Journalism tries to contain and direct the meaning of photographs with captions, context, lack of individual style, and literal storytelling. Photographs are too often mistaken for words or facts by the text editors who control their usage. They are used to illustrate text. They become redundant.[386]

Jacobson is not only trying to produce alternative visual information about the depicted situation or object, but also to be open about the extent to which his own preconceptions, personal attitudes, preferences and disregards etc. are part of his photographic practise. One could formulate that the subjective factor of Jacobson's documentary photography is a general characteristic of all photojournalism, which means that there is no such thing as a pure representation of reality in that field either.

Jacobson's self-reflective aesthetics also comprises a critique of the implicit ethics of traditional photojournalism. I am referring especially to his decision to abolish that side of

[386] Jeff Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, fifth page of introduction, first column.

modernist documentary-photography whose aesthetics is essentially marked by a dramatic or tragic element. In the modernist point of view, the shocking motif that evokes dismay, rage, sorrow and compassion is always understood to be an immediate expression of the conscience of the photographer. However in Jacobson's photographs we find two especially significant elements which indicate that he has turned away from that tradition. Firstly there is the unspectacular and non-shocking character of many of his motifs, and secondly the estrangement effect that is caused by the blur and over-saturation of the colours in his images. In the late 1930s when colour film was invented, photography lost its last inherent abstractness, which is the transformation of colour into grey-scales. Through his garish and blurred colours Jacobson tries to evoke a feeling for the fact that colour too is a photographic sign (or in Barthes' terms connotation) that indicates (the genre) realism.

> We also tend to associate colour in photographs with facts, because of the predominance of colour in journalism and advertising, both of which pretend to transmit facts. As a colour photographer, my challenge is not to get stuck in the facts presented in the pictures. I want my pictures to give me information about the world while allowing me to transcend that information and play in the realm of my imagination.[387]

Jacobson's use of colour has produced similar effects as the ones we noticed in Misrach's images. Both photographers aestheticise the depicted scene or object in order to draw attention to the fact that the political message of a photograph is not only determined by the meaning of the depicted situation. Jacobson's playing with colour can also be understood as an implicit reflection on the fact that his photographs do not only serve the aforementioned humanist and ethical tendency of modernist photojournalism but also his own personal interests. That does not mean that humanistically inspired photojournalism is unable to serve ethically important purposes, but one has to be aware of the fact that it can also be a vehicle of the photographer's narcissism and willingness to exploit the photographed subjects.

One could thus come to the conclusion that the aestheticisation of Jacobson's photographs has two main purposes. Firstly to create a space for his subjective, imaginary and unconscious ideas, and secondly, to raise the awareness that journalistic colour photography is not free from the subjective influences. All photographic genre are based on specific aesthetical principles and discoursive rules, which is why the notion of a purely objective and realistic photograph is an impossible ideal. Yet, this also means that even the most abstract photograph shows some realistic aspects of the depicted object and (or) of the way this object is

[387] Jeff Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, fifth page of introduction, first column.

perceived. In regard to Jacobson's images this means that, for example, the blur and the fragmented framing are examples of visual perceptions which constantly happen at the periphery of our visual field, i.e. outside of our consciousness. Despite their peripheral status these impressions are still an important part of the whole process of visual perception and the way we view our 'world'.

What could be the next step in the gradual understanding of these peripheral and marginal impressions, and how is it possible to approach them without turning this alternative aesthetics into a photographic school or genre? The Jungian psychoanalyst Russell Lockhart presents us a possible answer, where he tries to suspend sense and to leave meaning in a state of ambiguity. It is interesting that Lockhart insists that there should be no psychoanalytical knowledge involved in this process, unless it is not that of the analyst but that of the person who is 'lying on the couch'. He writes:

> Am I to treat these photographs as if they were my patient, to develop a therapy for the pathology of images? Am I to psychoanalyze Jeff Jacobson based on these images, as if, like dreams, they were a subjective confession of his personal demons (...) ? Am I to explain his art by interpreting the revelations of personal history he makes in his introduction? (...) Are these my tasks? If so, I refuse them. (...) I have lost all heart to treat art with the tools of my trade. Better that such births be aborted early. I yearn for something *else*, some more fruitful conception.[388]

This 'something else' that informs Lockhart's visual perception of Jacobson's photographs has many references to concepts we discussed in the former chapters. It is an unstructured mixture of Freudian free associating, Barthes' differentiation between *studium* and *punctum*, Lacan's concept of the object a and Derrida's etymological mode of deconstructing a text. First of all it seems necessary to resist any classification, which in this case means not to label Jacobson's photographs from the outset as strictly journalistic or documentary. Of course, they are journalistic to some extent but they also comprise many elements which exceed the realistic depiction and description of a specific scene or object.

Lockhart opposes the obligation to immediately interpret these images and therefore introduces the somewhat antiquated term 'Eros' in order to characterise the psychological and emotional state of the viewer, which is a necessary condition for a narrative to develop. The term of a photograph's story or narrative also contains the paradoxical moment which Barthes has called the 'catastrophe which has already occurred', i.e. the death of the photographed

[388] Russell Lockhart, "A Sense of Menace." Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, second and third page.

person. Although one essential characteristic of photography is its ability to 'grasp' and fix a moment in time (a presence, a 'now') it also comprises the past ('now' becoming 'then')[389] as well as the future, viz. in anticipation of death. "This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future."[390] Barthes is right with his 'dark' prognosis insofar as photographs generally evoke a feeling of transitoriness because of their stillness, silence and the elimination of the flow of time. Yet, one can also conclude that every photograph is the starting point, the 'birthplace' for another photograph (a following moment in time) which also includes its 'narrative' or meaning in the broadest sense. Hence Lockhart calls the image, that is 'burned' into the light-sensitive emulsion of the film, a 'mother' who bears another future. "Every photograph is a progenitor, always birthing a future. Its Eros lies there. In what comes next. But where is this *next?*"[391] This 'next' can be completely different and independent from the depicted 'real' content of the image, which is why the spinning forth of the narrative may be a product of the fantasy of the viewer.

One can also use Barthes' differentiation between *studium* and *punctum* in order to formulate this psycho-active 'next' in terms, which show us again that we have left the realm of the traditional documentary photograph. It is impossible to make the intention of the photographer and the recipients view completely coincide, except in that field which Barthes calls the *studium*. The conscious composition of a photograph and its concrete content (the depicted scene or object), which are determinable in terms of an 'objective reality' are excluded from the sphere which Lockhart calls 'Eros'. If that 'next' is able to bring forth a 'truth', it has to transcend the *studium* and give way to a narrative beyond the requirements and rules of a formal interpretation:

> In my reverie, *My fellow Americans* ... becomes a dream, the impossible dream, an open letter to us from a *truth-telling* president. A letter without words, because words have become as empty and untrue as our cherished forms and rituals. Instead, he opens the masks that cover our last sanctuary - everyday life - invites us to peer in, lets the high horror see us directly (...). Everyone grasps for the black and white of certainty, but this reach is obliterated continually by a carnival of color, where nothing can be seen as it

[389] See the discussion of Duane Michals' photo-montage "Now becoming then." page 214 of this study.
[390] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.
[391] Lockhart, "A Sense of Menace." Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, fifth page, first column.

was meant to be seen, seen instead, now, how it must be seen: the smiling mask unveiled revealing what no one dare say.[392]

This difficult technique to uncover, lay open and deconstruct an all too easily accepted normality of the everyday is a subversion of the status quo through stories, associations and fantasies evoked by the *punctum* of the photograph. It provides a basis for changes which originate from individual life-styles that are not under the spell of a normative aesthetics.

Jacobson's unorthodox photographic practise opens up opportunities to find in photography's implicit 'future' not only a repetition of an unchangeable past reality but also ways to alter, rearrange and recreate that reality in accordance with one's own requirements and needs. "Eros is a generative spirit crossing all borders, and when one welcomes this, opens oneself to it, as the artist does, one will take 'effective part in the work of creation.' Thus does Eros gives birth to the future."[393] If we apply this to Jacobson's specific aesthetics one could also say that his images reflect moments and situations where the *punctum* of the journalistic photograph appears.

To make this point clearer we should briefly recall Derrida's characterisation of the winter garden photograph as the *punctum* of *Camera Lucida*. Thus in his remark it does not refer to a photographic representation but to a text. However, this does not mean that Jacobsons's photographs lack their own specific *punctum*. "Last thing about the *punctum*: whether or not it is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there.*"[394] In my view this brief remark is a valid characterisation of Jacobson's journalistic and documentary work. He shows us the same public events, poses, speeches, performances which have always been the subject of the photographic genre photojournalism, yet one can sense in every image his search (desire) for something that is already there but becomes visible only through his specific aesthetics, his photographic addition. In this sense we can also understand Lockhart's statement, that Jacobson has photographed the American society, its rites, ceremonies, sacrileges, ideological symbols and signs of power at a moment, when it was not aware of this taking place, when it did not look back. The temporal 'in-between', the peripheral framing, the blurred traces of a significant pose are that element which punctures the traditional journalistic photo.

The expression 'not looking back' can help us to understand another important element in Jacobson's work, viz. Lacan's 'object a' whose 'twinkling' and 'glistening' makes us aware that

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[392] Lockhart, "A Sense of Menace." Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, sixth page, first column.
[393] Lockhart, "A Sense of Menace." Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, third page, second column.
[394] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 55.

seeing is a multi-directional process.[395] According to Lacan, the seeing subject is also looked at by the things it sees, which means in the most abstract sense by light in general. In a similar fashion Lockhart writes: "I look at Jeff's photograph of the old couple holding a photograph; I'll be in that scene, holding photographs, too, not too long from now. That doesn't disturb me; I look forward to then."[396] (Figure 13)

Jacobson's use of flash-light, its specific aesthetic effects and their immediate meaning for his 'photographic language' is another point where one can draw a connection to the concept of the 'object a'. In a preparatory step of his photographic practise he becomes part of the tableau (the scene to be documented), camouflaging his real identity and intentions. At a specific moment of the event, he breaks through that 'veil' of inconspicuousness in order to puncture and deconstruct it by taking on the function (position) of the 'object a'.

> I'm with about a thousand people under a tent on a sweltering summer night. They are listening in rapture as the leader of the Christian Patriots Defense League rants his hatred of 'Satan's Children,' the Jews. I am the only photographer shooting, standing in a no man's land between the crowd and the speaker. His eyes narrow, his focus falls upon me, and, spitting his venom against Jews, says, 'I can sense when they're around me. My skin crawls.' I do the only thing left to me. I press the shutter and nail him right between the eyes with the flash from my strobe.[397]

What could the flash-light be other than Lacan's glistening and seeing 'object a'? In a remark about how he became a photographer, Jacobson provides us with a similarly meaningful description of his 'photo-philosophy', which reveals strong references to Lacan's concept of mimicry. Jacobson tells us about his family role as 'ok-kid', which meant for him to be unobtrusive, easy-going and adaptable. "I learned to blend into the woodwork. (This survival tactic would later serve me well as a photographer.)"[398] This kind of 'becoming invisible' is quite the opposite of what is usually practised in photojournalism. In the modernist understanding the photographer holds a clearly defined position of power in relation to the photographed object, which is most obvious in its ability to make that object take on a specific pose.

Considering the aforementioned episode at the meeting of the Christian Patriots Defense League, one could say that the postmodern moment in Jacobson's photographic practise is his

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[395] See Lacan's 'adventure' with Petit-Jean and the sardine can, footnote 51, page 30.
[396] Lockhart, "A Sense of Menace." Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, sixth page, first column..
[397] Jacobson, "Introduction." *My Fellow Americans*, second page, first column.
[398] Lockhart, "A Sense of Menace." Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, first page, second column.

disregard for the commonly accepted consent between photographer and photographed object. Jacobson's images show very clearly that he tries to expose and deconstruct the pose in its function as a mask. His photographs represent the invisible and overlooked Other of the meaningful and readable pose.

7.3 Barbara Kruger

I now intend to discuss a number of female photographers whose images are all more or less concerned with feminist themes. It should be clear though, that these feminist works can be interpreted in more ways than the ones outlined in chapters four and five.

Kruger's images which we are first going to look at are accompanied by short, slogan-like and provocative statements which create a strong contrast to the 'literal' meaning of her photographs. In general, Kruger's approach could best be described as political with a feminist and humanist agenda. More than any other of the previously discussed photographers, Kruger's photo-text-installations expose and deconstruct the discourses which perpetuate patriarchal power-structures. Her work is concerned with the 'microphysics of power' in its many expressions and their often subtle effects, intending to find concrete political imperatives that might change the unjust circumstances.

The most significant aesthetical characteristic of her work is a baffling similarity with a style that is very prominent in advertising.[399] The size of many of her images equals that of electronic billboards and posters which she exhibits not only in galleries and museums but also on house-walls, in bus-shelters, train-stations and other public places with a lot of through-traffic. The short slogans that accompany the texts are written in white letters on a red or black square that is placed directly on the image. The spatial relationship between image and text suggests that the text is a personal remark of the depicted person or, in some cases, a remark directed at the depicted person. Many of the photographs are not Kruger's own but 'recycled' from magazines, news-papers and other mass media. Kruger's renunciation of originality and her way of altering the context of the images turns out carefully crafted plagiarisms of advertisements, movie posters or political banners which mock the advertised 'product'. One could sum up the motives that drive her work with the following catalogue of questions which she proposed in an interview in 1995: "The questions are the ones I'm continuously asking - 'Who speaks,' 'Who is silent,' 'Who prefers questions to answers,' 'Who

dies first,' 'Who laughs last,' 'Who salutes the longest,' 'Who prays loudest,' 'Who is beyond the law,' 'Who will write the history of tears.'"[400]

It might be helpful to briefly recollect the feminist strategy discussed in chapter four which states that, because of the lack of an 'écriture feminine', one has to expose the misrepresentations, in-equalities and suppressive mechanisms of the dominant discourses from within. In a similar fashion Kruger abstains from developing a genuine feminine photographic style to counter misogynist, exploitative and sexist aesthetics. Instead she subtly violates and distorts existing photographic codes to expose their biased attitude towards women. One could thus say that her critique has two different targets, viz. the current social-political circumstances and also the way they are conveyed and represented.

Even though the analysis of Barthes' structuralist texts on photography has shown us that the differentiation between content and form is culturally determined, it still has the advantage (as a hypothetical premise) that it demonstrates the way they are inter-connected. This implies that criticising one of these elements automatically affects the other one as well. I would like to illustrate this dynamics through one of Kruger's best known works which is titled *My Face Is Your Fortune* (figure 14). It is made up of a typical advertising photograph and the text 'My face is your fortune', which is written partly on the image and partly on its lower margin. The image shows a scene which we would expect in an advertisement for a face-lotion, moisturiser, soap etc.: A woman scoops water with her well manicured hands on her elegantly proportioned face. Yet, instead of the name of the product and a positive message, we read the remarkably ambivalent sentence 'My face is your fortune'. With two of Kruger's above mentioned questions in mind ('Who speaks?' and 'Who is silent'?) we can ask whether it is indeed uttered by the producer of the goods who is addressing female buyers, or whether it is the voice of the depicted woman (or any women's voice). If it is the women's voice one could understand the sentence as an expression of her awareness of the very real link between the beauty-ideal (youthfulness-ideal) for women, the subtle pressure to buy a range of 'beauty-products' and the wealth (fortune) of those who promise to sell a reliable means to reach that ideal. Money buys beauty, youthfulness and therefore also happiness.

One can imagine alternative meanings of this sentence which also have an effect on the photographic message. For example, if we identify the pronoun 'I' again with the depicted women but use the other common meaning of the term fortune (fate), the sentence could be read in the following way: My (elegantly proportioned, beautiful, young, ideal) face is (in its

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[399] It should not surprise us to hear, that Kruger has worked for many years as graphic designer for several women's magazines.

[400] Barbara Kruger, Interview with Carol Squiers, *Aperture* 138, 63.

function as an ideal and obligatory norm) your (all you normal and average women's) fate (because you have to accept that your desirability and attractiveness is measured against this norm). In this second meaning of 'fortune' as fate, the sentence expresses the age old custom (truth?) that women's power is mainly measured by the degree of their desirability and physical attractiveness.

I would now like to discuss the ambivalences and ambiguities of the 'photographic signifiers'. Although at first sight it seems to represent an example of the genre of advertising photograph, if one looks at it more closely, a number of 'frictions' in the code become visible which create a rather uncanny impression instead of the usual high-gloss look. One of Kruger's most obvious manipulations in her recycled (copied, mimicked) photographs is a strong cropping of the image, which is untypical for most advertising photography.[401] In this sense *My Face Is Your Fortune* lacks the signifier 'highly modern, anti-septic bathroom' because the image only shows a small piece of dark and abstract background that is visible in the space between the model's hands and face. Another violation of the usual aesthetics is Kruger's choice of a very short exposure time which makes the water dripping down from the model's face look as though it was 'frozen'. The image thus lacks the appropriate 'softness' and has, in conjunction with the slightly skewed up eyes of the model which reveal a few disadvantageous wrinkles, a rather repulsive character. The 'solidity' of the water which is dripping from her nose and mouth and its glistening reflections gives the motif a metallic quality, which does not convey feelings of optimism and happiness but rather of pain and despair. In general one could say that the most important part of Kruger's work is a slight shift of emphasis in the relationship between the signifying elements which destabilises the original message of the image.

Her work *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture*, which shows a 'passive-seductive' and beautiful face of a woman whose eyes are covered with leaves, seems to be a programmatic illustration of one of poststructuralism's main concerns, which is to restore the suppressed 'Other' of a dominant concept. This implies, for example, that we constantly question the possibility of an exact definition of the meaning of the terms artificial and natural. Her works thus always ask: What are the natural characteristics and gender-roles of women? Who, in

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[401] This is one of the most significant aesthetic characteristic of the works in her exhibition at Mary Boone Gallery in New York (1994), which is mainly concerned with the pressure exerted on the individual subject by mass-movements, mass-discourses, mass-media etc. (See Kruger, "Interview with Squiers." *Aperture* 138, 58-61.)

To say that radical cropping is untypical for advertising needs to be qualified because there are now a number of fields in the advertising business where this typically postmodern element has become a standard feature. At first it was most prominent in music-videos which led to the term 'MTV-aesthetics' but is now also often used in fashion photography, advertising etc.

political and economical matters, naturally has the last word? Is male sexuality always aggressive and female sexuality naturally passive and submissive? Are the cruelties and atrocities that people inflict on each other, natural symptoms of the 'conditio humana'? Is the exclusion, 'extinction' and defamation of minorities by political, social or economical majorities a natural right?

I think it is necessary to further analyse Kruger's use of the pronouns 'I', 'we' and 'you' because they are an important element in almost all of the texts that accompany her images. The ambivalent positions of the speaker(s) and the one(s) addressed by them, enable Kruger to stay clear of any essentialist or fundamentalist attitudes. There is no doubt that many of the voices in her texts critically address 'men' and the representatives of male power in general, but none of them are based on the concept of a good, yet suppressed femininity versus an aggressive and evil maleness. Instead we are confronted with phrases and slogans 'thrown at us' which sound strangely anonymous, serene, ambiguous and cynical. To understand how Kruger creates this ambiguity it is helpful to consider the psychoanalytical concept of identification, because it is so obviously 'immune' against 'natural' barriers such as the strict division between the sexes etc. For example, a male viewer of *Your Comfort is My Silence* (figure 15), which shows the strongly shaded face of a man who has put the index finger on his lips and on top of which Kruger printed the sentence 'Your comfort is my silence', might identify with the 'my silence' but not with the man's face or the position of the 'your comfort'. The photography critic John Pultz concludes that "(s)ince no specific, fixed identity is referred to by these pronouns, however, the relationships suggested are in flux and uncertain. 'I' might refer to Kruger, the viewer, or some fictitious persona; similarly 'you' shifts to function differently with male and female viewers."[402] This work could thus be understood in a non-feminist fashion, i.e. as a general exposition of the fact that power-differences can be unvealed by such simple questions as: Who speaks? Who is silent? irrespective of whether this regards relationships between men and women, adults and children, teacher and student or just any majorities and minorities.

Compared with Kruger's work from the eighties, her images from the nineties seem to have a less explicit feminist agenda. Instead they are more generally concerned with in-equality, unfairness, misrepresentation and the pressure to conform to dominant discourses. To illustrate this tendency we might contrast a few other of her works from the early eighties with those from the large and complex installations at Mary Boone Gallery, New York, and at Serpentine Gallery, London, from the mid-nineties. Text and image of the earlier photographs,

[402] John Pultz, *Photography and the Body*, 153.

which are more or less concerned with a number of male dominated everyday myths and stereotypes, suggest that the subject of the text speaks from the position of 'woman' addressing 'man' (who is represented by the male persons in the images): *Your Assignment Is to Divide and Conquer*, *Your Fictions Become History*, *You Make History When You Do Business*, *You Construct Intricate Rituals Which Allow You to Touch the Skin of Other Men*, *Your Moments of Joy Have the Precision of Military Strategy*, *You Are Seduced by the Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, *Your Manias Become Science* (figures 16-22). In contrast, the images and texts of the 1994 installations (figures 25-26) expose the uncanny combination of a populist rhetoric with the gestures and special charisma of 'natural' leaders who try to instil hate and despair in the masses. Kruger remarks that

> (t)he focus was not primarily on the evangelical. It had to do in my mind with any kind of univocal discourse - if we can even call it a discourse - a rant, which says to people, 'You do not agree with me, I am going to kill you. You do not agree with me, I want you disappeared.' (...) 'How dare you not be me?' That's the dance. That was a sort of mantra for the entire installation.[403]

In general one could say that all the short and similarly structured statements are urging the addressed people to conform to the main-stream values. Their concrete content is of minor importance because in each case the underlying message is: Become what (like) we are!, which is an example of the Foucauldian dictum that the individual subject is largely a product of the dominant discourses. This, I think, is the sense of Kruger's slogans: "Believe Like Us", "Fear Like Us", "Pray Like Us", "Laugh Like Us", "Hate Like Us", "Look Like Us", "Talk Like Us" etc.

All her works comprise a second text-element which seems to be a quiet comment on the 'screaming' slogans. For example, the image with the title *Fight Like Us* (figure 28) is accompanied by a number of short sentences which address a non-specified 'You' and its implicit fears and insecurities, which are likely to be the psychological reasons for the relentless imperatives: "Your Inability to Empathise. Your Eroticised Combats. Your Big Shot

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See also Graham Clarke, *The Photograph*, 128-9.

[403] Kruger, "Interview with Squiers." *Aperture* 138, 64-5.

We also find an interesting example of fascist language in one of her earlier works. The work *We Will Undo You* (figure 23) shows a female hand dressed in gauze, which is marked by the signs of life-long physical labour. The significant element of this image is the ambiguity of the word 'undo'. It could either mean to change the gauze or to destroy (the woman's life). It seems obvious that this work can be interpreted in a feminist fashion, if one emphasises the fact that it is the hand of a woman or in a 'socialist' fashion if one understands the signs of hard physical labour as a metaphor for the exploitation of 'the working classes'.

Kruger's 1994 installation also comprises a photograph which could be understood as a critique of the 'second-class' status of woman in patriarchal society. The image shows a woman in half-profile whose face is covered with a bellaclava. The accompanying text reads: "Your constant seeking for yourself and others, your campaign for a world without women." (Figure 27)

Careers."[404] The image *Hate Like Us* (figure 29) which is a close up of the face of an angry man comprises the additional text: "Your Fear and Loathing. Your Resolute Cruelty. Your Relentless Humiliations."[405] Considering Kruger's statement that these works are concerned with the power structure of the 'discourses of the majority', one possibility of merging the fragmentary texts is to read them like a consecutive clause or like a conditional clause. One could thus formulate: If you follow our hatred (develop hate against the same people and things), then you will not be confronted with our fear, disgust, cruelty and humiliation. Or alternatively: You either follow our hatred (our debasement of those whom we find 'hate-worthy'), or you will suffer as well from our fear, disgust, cruelty and humiliation.

To conclude this section on Kruger we will look at a work of hers which deals with the subject abortion and self-determined birth control. *Your Body Is a Battleground* (figure 24) is made up of this short statement and the photographic portrait of an elegantly proportioned and beautiful women. One half of the image is a positive print, the other half a negative print. The text is divided in three segments of which one is positioned at the upper margin, the second in the middle of the image and the third at the lower end. Originally the work was created in connection with the 'pro-choice march' in 1989 in Washington and the text of that version was: "Support Abortion, Birth Control, and Women's Rights". If we consider the Foucauldian concept of how the modern state keeps control over the bourgeois subject, one can easily imagine how the two different texts could be connected. Whereas the earlier version is a relatively straight forward feminist claim, the meaning of the statement of the later work "Your Body is a Battleground" seems to be much less obvious. Yet, if we imagine that this text too represents a feminist position and is addressed at 'woman', the term 'battlefield' in its metaphorical sense would be an allusion to the governmentally regulated access to, and control over the female body (including the foetus).

This interpretation is of course not exhaustive because one could also situate image and text in the context of advertising, understanding the bodies of women as that 'battlefield' where the producers of beauty-products carry out their battles for more market shares.

We are now going to discuss a number of photographers who are concerned with the explicit representation of (women's) sexuality, which does not feature highly in Kruger's work. Cindy Sherman is probably one of the most prominent representatives of a deconstructive photographic approach, which questions gender-specific stereotypes and sexist bias.[406]

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[404] Kruger, "Interview with Squiers." *Aperture* 138, 58.
[405] Kruger, "Interview with Squiers." *Aperture* 138, 58.
[406] There is still only a small number of female photographers who try to create alternative sexual imagery that is critical of the sexist aesthetics in main-stream erotica and pornography. To my knowledge there is no female photographer producing erotica and pornography for heterosexual women who has the same 'cult-status' as, for

7.4 Cindy Sherman

The works of Cindy Sherman can roughly be divided in six phases which span a period of nearly thirty years. In this context the series *Sex Pictures* (*Mannequin Pictures*) is of main interest.[407]

There is a personal statement of Sherman which might be a good starting point for the understanding of the problematic content of the *Sex Pictures*. In an interview from 1993 she described her approach with the following words: "When I started working on this sex series I would be within a female character and do the most basic female sex take-off shot. Then I did a male version of it. As the series progressed, I started taking the bodies apart more and more and so they got more ... disjointed. Oh dear! Deconstructed."[408] Even though Sherman uses the term 'deconstruction' in a slightly ironic way, she is still pointing out an essential element of her work. In analogy to Spivak's deconstructive slogan "Use it, don't accuse it!" one could say that Sherman too uses the 'inscriptions' at the bodies of the heterosexual pornographic discourse in order to expose the various possibilities in which the 'signifying units' body-parts, body-postures and body-orifices can be taken out of context and put together in an alternative way. Sherman produces a strong critique of the sexist ideology of heterosexual pornography without the need for a genuine female position (aesthetics). Her works though do not explore what pornography could look like beyond heterosexual sexism.[409]

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example, Helmut Newton (heterosexual erotica for men) and Robert Mapplethorpe (homosexual S/M erotica and pornography).

[407] This series differs from all her former projects because, for the first time, she is not her own model. In my view Angela Smith's explanation of the significant fact that in the 'Sex Pictures' Sherman was not her own model and instead employed medical 'dolls' and dolls from sex shops, is only partly true. She argues that Sherman tried to make a comment on the artificiality and fictional character of people's sexual identity and that her decision to use dolls was also an indication that there is no essence behind the surface of the mask 'femininity'. Compared with the critique about gender stereotypes and normative sexual behaviour which we find in the works of, for example, Robert Mapplethorpe, Jeff Koons or Annie Sprinkle, who photographed themselves engaged in explicit sexual acts, it seems as if Sherman's 'Sex Pictures' are marked by a certain prudishness which is detrimental to the otherwise brutal, merciless and aggressive sex-scenes. (See Angela Smith, "Sherman, Butler, and Performative Female Bodies".)

Photography critics have often pointed out the strong link between Sherman's 'Sex Pictures' and Hans Bellmer's works from the 1930s and 40s. Bellmer too produced sexually explicit and surreal images by using self-made female dolls (parts of dolls). Although, he also used real models for his staged scenes.

To be fair on Sherman one has to admit that, firstly, by using dolls instead of real people she avoided the almost certain censorship that her images would have been subjected to (Mapplethorpe, Koons, Sprinkle were fiercely censored). Secondly, using dolls puts even stronger emphasis on the fact that the pornographic discourse is continuously threatened by the bodily 'flaws' of the actors. The photo-critic Rosalind Krauss writes that "the medical-student mannequins and body parts and Halloween masks and prostheses cannot live up to, cannot match, the affect they induce. But in a sense the horror object need not even aim to be adequate, since it is only a decoy, not the real thing, only a herald of the real, a warning that horror is in the air." (Cindy Sherman, "Text by Rosalind Kraus." *Cindy Sherman*, 220.)

[408] Cindy Sherman, "Interview with David Goldsmith." *Aperture* 133, 37.

[409] See on this topic Naomi Salaman, *What She Wants. Women Artists Look at Men.* The exhibition contains a work that is another play on Magritte's *The Trachery of Images*. It is the photograph of a rubber dildo that is accompanied by the handwritten words 'Ceci n'est pas un pénis.'

I would like to illustrate Sherman's deconstructive 'performance art' with one well known image from the *Sex Pictures* series (*Untitled, 1992*, figure 30) which is a complex construction of doll-parts that suggests one of the most typical female poses in pornographic images: The seductive gaze of the female model directly addresses the viewer, suggesting an invitation to penetrate her clearly visible body-orifices. One could call it an 'opening-scene' which has the purpose of merging the desire of the viewer with the desire of the model. In Sherman's image though, the allusion to this stereotypical pose is the only element that fits with conventional pornographic aesthetics. All the other signifiers of the pornographic code are deconstructed, to the effect that the image has no arousing or seductive appeal but instead looks highly repulsive, because sexual desire and sexual identity have become highly unstable. Apart from the man's old and wrinkled face (the mask) that contradicts the dominant ideal of youthfulness and sexual desirability, the most disturbing element is his gaze that is not sly and seductive but bluntly male and therefore a threat to the viewer's desire.[410]
Sherman does not comply with the rule that desire has to float in an 'in-between', in ambiguity and ambivalence or else it will quickly vanish. We need to quote again what Kaite says about the ambiguity of the gaze.

> What makes the moment pornographic is this partial masculinization of the ocular orifice, an orifice which begins as ambisexual; i.e., it can receive as well as emit. As part of the pornographic maneuver, the eye is aggressive, acquisitive, possessive: it invades the space of the reader, implicating him not only in the activity of looking but also as the one who is looked at.[411]

However, in Sherman's photograph the gaze of the model has only the aggressive and acquisitive (male/phallic) element which destroys the desire of the heterosexual pornographic discourse.[412] The other significant violation of the code appears in the way Sherman arranged the genitals of the doll. The grotesque look of the sex toy's genitals is further heightened by two sausages that protrude from its vagina. In contrast to Graham Clarke, who understands this macabre scene as a satire about male power and the "myth of the penis"[413], one could interpret the vagina-sausage construct as a fetishistic scenario, because the phallic organ is removed from its usual 'context' and instead seems to be part of the female genitals. Another significant element of the scene is, that the phallus is represented by an edible object which

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[410] David Lynch's film *Lost Highway* (1998) contains a scene with a very similar dynamics. The face of the beautiful main actress is substituted by the skull-like face of an old man who, throughout the film, represents death.
[411] Kaite, *Pornography and Difference*, 79.
[412] See Kaite, *Pornography and Difference*, 80 and 83.
[413] See Graham Clarke, *The Photograph*, 132.

carries connotations of a 'vagina dentata' that triggers castration anxiety instead of sexual arousal.

The fact that Sherman's 'Sex Pictures' evoke such a dramatic effect, even though they depict only dolls, is a strong indication that the representation of sexual desire does not depend on realistic 'signifiers' (also that 'realistic' signifiers are also signs). And yet, the signifying elements of the pornographic discourse can only ever be approximations of that desire, whose unmediated or total experience (Lacan's jouissance) implies the disintegration of the ego. In Krauss' view

> (t)he body is everything that cannot be turned into representation, and for this reason is never directly recognizable: if, in our minds, we were to picture this body-outside-discourse, it would not *resemble* a body at all, since the body-as-resemblance is precisely that into which it may not be converted. (...) In the Sex Pictures series, Sherman manages to play with exactly this gap between the body as the ecstasy-of-discourse and that body's inadequate stand-ins on the representational stage."[414]

Sherman's 'Sex Pictures' series shows us that the sexual behaviour and the sexual identity of a person is not determined by an a priori gender-identity. Sex and gender are so closely intertwined that subverting or deconstructing one of them automatically affects the other one as well. Deviant sexual behaviour has a destabilising effect on the corresponding gender identity and vice versa, gender identity always influences sexual behaviour.

7.5 Marianne Müller

In my view, Sherman's works are slightly unbalanced because her horrifying critique of the sexism and stereotypes of heterosexual pornography (sexuality) leaves no room for positive 'images of desire'. Despite the limited 'truth-value' and authenticity of autobiographical data, I would like to consider a statement by Sherman which can give us an idea about the one-sidedness of her work.

> I'm generally someone who likes to be happy and find the positive side of things. But not in my work. To drive my work, I've gone beyond my earlier money and relationship struggles to other struggles in the world, but I still use

[414] Cindy Sherman, "Essay by Norman Bryson." *Cindy Sherman*, 220.

personal fears to keep my work moving. I wanted to do some happy and nice pictures but I found I could only show the underside.[415]

Instead of trying to find out why this might be the case, I would now like to discuss a photographer whose images are much lighter, less accusatory and threatening, even though they represent a critical alternative to the conventions of traditional, main-stream nude-photography and pornography.

The young Swiss photographer Marianne Müller has recently published a photo-book entitled *Marianne Müller. A Part of My Life*, which contains a number of sexually charged photographs whose explicitness spans from vaguely erotic to openly pornographic. In contrast to Sherman though, Müller is her own model in the nude photographs as well. She develops a photographic language (aesthetics) which is not only subversive but also able to visualise sexual desire in a way that is compellingly realistic although still beautiful and positive.[416] Her artistic approach is much closer to the raw, unpolished, and often awkwardly posed photographs of someone like Nan Goldin or Wolfgang Tillmans, whose aesthetics are very influential in postmodern 'zeitgeist' magazines, fashion and advertising photography that aims at a young and trendy clientele.[417]

Müller's photographs show some of the elements that we discussed in regard to the works of Jacobson and Frank, such as the disregard for balanced compositions, blurred and in-correctly exposed motifs, the use of harsh flash-light and the arbitrariness of the pose (figure 31). Müller speaks of a number of recurring themes but what seems more important is that she asks the viewers to monitor their reactions to the photographs which offer us glimpses of Müller's private and intimate everyday life, the way she transforms her experiences into a remarkable aesthetics that is always at the edge of a naive exhibitionism and authentic self-exploration. She states about herself that

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[415] Cindy Sherman, "Interview with David Goldsmith." *Aperture* 133, 37.

[416] Another significant element of her works is something I would call a 'contained exhibitionism'. The reason why Müller shows us images of her private life is very different to the intended effects of the exhibitionism in pornography. Her images always question at what point our desiring gaze becomes voyeuristic because she never gives the viewer permission to believe that we are the object of her desire. In contrast, one of the most important elements of the pornographic discourse is the viewer's uncritical belief in the model's pretence, that her (his) desire is directed specifically at us and not just at anybody who is willing to pay for the images. Müller, however, says that "(p)orn doesn't interest me, as consumer or producer, and not as something to critique. This is about something different altogether, the process of seeing, or recognising, of awe or confusion; it is about emotions, distance and proximity, warmth and coldness." (Müller, "Interview with CC." *Creative Camera*, issue 353, 50.)

[417] This is a good example of another typical characteristic of postmodern (art-) photography, which is the abolition of the boundary between art and mass-culture, art and commerce, art and kitsch etc. One also has to ask to what extent art photography might be influenced by the aesthetics of mass-culture and advertising. Thus it is not surprising that a number of the most famous contemporary art-photographers are at the same time the most sought-after and highest paid advertising and fashion photographers. To name but a few: Steven Meisel, Richard Avedon, Annie Leibovitz, Helmut Newton, Ellen von Unwerth, Peter Lindbergh, Herb Ritts, Bruce Weber, Wolfgang Tilmans.

> *A Part of My Life* comprises photographs taken during the past four years. They are fragments documenting and investigating my body as a narrative and as a sculpture, subtle shifts in atmosphere and emotions. They explore what it means to be a woman taking pictures at the end of the century; (...) The real challenge, however, lies in ordering these glimpses and scraps of everyday life, in observing the gradual unfolding of a panoramic vision of memory and an artistic statement.[418]

The interesting point of this statement is Müller's understanding of her body as narrative and sculpture and not primarily as image. Surprising as this might seem, it provides us with an idea of how to put her images that deal with sexuality and gender identity in context with conventional nude-photography and pornography.

One of the most significant characteristic of her self-portraits and nudes is that her gaze and her body-posture never suggest the stereotypical pose 'feminine seduction'. Even when her gaze is directed at the camera or her body is fully visible, one can still feel a distance that stops the viewer from imagining him/her to be part of the scene. Müller does not need us to complete the tableau of which she is both the photographing subject and the photographed object. To a certain extent though, we are witnesses of her private sphere (the naked body, her heterosexual relationship, her flat) but their remains a gap and a strange emptiness which shows us that her photographs are not made with the intent to satisfy our voyeurism but first of all her own. Furthermore she is driven by the artistic curiousness to find out what people, things and situations look like when they are photographed, and then to ask whether the photographic process has a specific effect on them. It is thus not surprising to find Müller describing her artistic approach in a similar way as Winnogrand. "Shooting pictures influences and changes everyday rituals through the act of observing them. Conversely, rituals suddenly seem to develop a life of their own and start wondering what it would be like to be photographed."[419]

There is no doubt that Müller's nude images contain a considerable element of narcissism although they are taken in a style which is very different from cool-modernist black and white photography as well as from the high-gloss aesthetics of contemporary advertising photography. Her nude photographs never show the fetish female model whose main function is to arouse sexual desire. Instead they represent us with a large number of fragmented views of a body which is always part of a scene, situation or interaction that refers to a 'beyond' the image. Despite their raw, realistic and unglamorous look, Müller's photographs speak of

[418] Müller, *A Part of My Life*, back cover page.

something in a very tender way that one could call 'animus' or soul, using Barthes' antiquated vocabulary.[420] There is a passage in *Camera Lucida* where Barthes reflects on the controversial and hardly determinable difference between erotica and pornography.

> The erotic photograph (...) takes the spectator outside its frame, and it is there that I animate this photograph and that it animates me. The *punctum*, then, is a kind of subtle beyond - as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see: not only toward 'the rest' of the nakedness, not only toward the fantasy of a *praxis*, but toward the absolute excellence of a being, body and soul together.[421]

Müller's nudes too have this transcendence which is apparent in the way they relate to the other images. In contrast to the pornographic photograph which shows 'everything' without leaving space for the viewer's imagination, except for the staged circuit of desire, Müller's images always allude to an Other that is not part of the image. The importance of this 'beyond' is also one of the reasons for the baffling indifference towards her photographic motifs. No matter whether she photographs herself whilst she has sex, takes a bath, gets dressed or undressed, when she wakes up etc. or whether she captures the view of flowers, dirty clothes, a house, the evening sky, a back yard, a door, rubbish on the pathway etc., the viewer is always compelled to ask: What is the context of these images?

In my view this question is not as difficult to answer than it might at first seem because it is not necessary to reconstruct Marianne Müller's life, to analyse her emotions and her psyche or the relationship she has with the almost 'invisible' man, whose presence can only vaguely be recognised in some photographs that show his clothes, a hairy leg, a fondling hand or the blurred contours of his genitals. Instead, her images can be understood as unrestrained and uncensored visual associations which represent an alternative to the century-old tradition where 'woman' is the photographed object and 'man' the photographing subject.[422]

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[419] Müller, *A Part of My Life*, back cover page.

[420] In general one could say that Müller's style is a recycling of an aesthetics that (modernist) art-photography has always labelled 'amateur-photography'. In the early seventies though, a photographic avant-garde discovered that this specific approach is an effective tool to deal with the aesthetics of mass-culture in late capitalism. What used to be the experiments with the first Polaroid cameras has nowadays become the play with 'Happy Snaps' (disposable cameras), Russian four-lens disposable cameras made out of plastic, self-made pinhole cameras etc.

[421] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 59.
Surely pornography is a relationship between viewer and art object too – what some people see as banal, others become aroused – the imagination accompanying the pornographic gaze has a lot to do with the 'act' of pornography.
The image of a fully clothed woman can be used as a pornographic object by a person who seeks to employ such an image as a template for a sexual fantasy. In a way 'porn' as consumer product advances the fantasy to its penultimate stages – it does the undressing and the arousal for the consumer.

[422] The American photographer Natacha Merritt has recently published her *Digital Diaries* which is a large collection of mainly sexually charged self-portraits. Her overall approach, however, is much more pornographic

The women who create a photographic image of themselves and 'the world' from their own perspective, encounter the difficulty that, so far, no 'photographic language' or style exists that is not marked by a certain degree of male bias and sexism. This is a problem which is similar to the one discussed in chapter four where we asked, whether it is possible to create an 'écriture feminine' on the basis of a long-standing tradition that has denied 'woman' to develop her own voice. Looking at Müller's photographs one has to ask in a similar fashion whether it is possible to use the 'photo-camera' in a way, which does not automatically invest the photographic process with the aggressive and acquisitive connotations that are so clearly visible in the words usually used to describe it, such as 'loading the camera', 'targeting the motif', 'shooting a scene', 'capturing an object', etc.

When we discussed the meaning of the gaze in psychoanalytical and deconstructive terms it became clear, that the common understanding of the interaction between photographer and photographed object as one-sided is only partly true. Müller's images are a good example of the fact that the gaze tends to describe a circular movement, because she is, at the same time, photographer and photographed object, and also because she uses the camera differently from a capturing and acquisitive tool. What I called Müller's free associations are an attempt to create a tableau for her own visual unconsciousness and the fragmentary and random glimpses at the objects of her environment, that is not affected by any previous selection and censoring. It might be helpful in this context to refer again to Russell Lockhart's etymological dissection of the term film-emulsion, because he showed us that the photographic process comprises more than its male and phallic connotations. In my view, it is Müller's faith in, and artistic access to, this 'beyond the phallocracy' of the camera that characterises her images. She is on the way to develop a 'visualite feminine' which is an inherent, yet often suppressed element of the photographic process. In this sense Lockhart said that

> (w)hen we learn that the parent of emulsion is *melg-*, meaning 'to milk', a reverie begins, resonating with sensibilities we did not have before. Emulsion is photography's milk-place, the source of nourishment, the mother-layer within the camera darkness. What is born there requiring milk? Does light suckle on silver there? This milky layer, this feminine film, is where light and silver dwell. They have intercourse there. The camera is not all male after all. (...) When we photograph we milk reality for its truth.[423]

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than Müller's images. Even though Merritt explains that for her the camera is a means of self-exploration, her images show many elements of the conventional heterosexual pornographic discourse, especially the appeal to a voyeuristic gaze.

[423] Lockhart, "A Sense of Menace." Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, forth page, second column.

We might ask what the truth in her nude-photographs is about (if it exists at all), and what its meaning is in regard to the other, non-sexual images in her book? To find answers for these questions we should consider two terms that she used to describe her photographic approach: narrative and sculpture. The photographs of her body are always part of a narrative, they allude to an event or an 'other' that is not shown by the actual image. This contextualisation is the moment which interrupts the dynamics of desire between model and viewer in conventional erotica or pornography. In this sense she does not present her body as an object of desire but uses it as light-source which finds nourishment in the emulsion of the film.
The meaning of Müller's concept 'sculpture' might best be understood through her raw and unglamorous photographic style which is so obviously different from modernist art-photography and the high-gloss aesthetics of contemporary advertising. Despite the mundane and amateur-like aura of her images, the nudes appear almost like sculptures. It seems as if she intended to demonstrate that the perception of shape, spatial relations, contrast, three-dimensionality etc. is not affected if one also sees body-hair, veins, the pale pink of the skin etc. Furthermore, this anti-aesthetics diminishes the narcissistic element of her photographic self-reflections because it shows, that Müller does not want to eliminate the flaws of her body even though it would be easy to achieve this through a few simple photographic tricks. Her self-portraits and nudes resemble delicate, yet unpolished sculptures which contrast with the tendency of traditional advertising, erotica and pornography to produce well balanced compositions and perfect 'surfaces'. All her photographs show a remarkable serenity about the fact that investing 'woman' with the conventional fetishes of the erotic and pornographic discourse must come to a point where fantasmatic desire and reality collide.

7.6 Della Grace

The last example of sexually explicit photographs that we are going to discuss are the works of the American (lesbian) photographer Della Grace. She (and a few others) achieved for the 'coming out' of lesbian sexuality what Robert Mapplethorpe has done for the public acceptability of male homosexuality and sadomasochistic practices. It is interesting though, that these photographers have never received the same admiration and respect for their work as Mapplethorpe, whose popularity grew in proportion to the 'indecency' and bluntness of his images and his 'scandalous' life-style.
To understand Grace's works it is important to have the problem in mind, that lesbians do not only battle the sexism of conventional heterosexuality but also the pressure to conform to

politically correct sexual-behaviour that is exerted on them by fundamentalist feminists. As we saw in chapter five, post-feminists find themselves amidst the clashes of two different political positions, each of which favours a specific image of 'woman'. Susie Bright, former editor of the influential, yet controversial magazine *On Our Backs. Entertainment for the Adventurous Lesbian*, remarks that she "had two spectacles to rebel against: on one hand, the cultural feminist notion that lesbians were a gentler, kinder species, who wouldn't dream of penetration; and on the other hand, the prevalence of commercial porn girl/girl atrocities, with their plastic notions of womanhood, epitomized by fake nails and air-tongue kisses."[424]

Bright's appeal for a self-determined and unrestrained sexuality of gay women is mainly based on the following three concepts: the (sexual) unconscious, the necessary element of difference in the dynamics of desire, and the ambivalent meaning (economy) of the gaze. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that the works of lesbian (and feminist) photographers show the same deviancy, contradictions, eroticism, beauty, explicitness, aggressiveness, indecency etc. as images in heterosexual contexts. The political message of this diversity could generally be described as the right to explore and act out every imaginable heterogeneous facet of sexuality within a homosexual context, which is possible only if sexual identity is not bound to a specific normative sexual behaviour.

One of the most obvious features of Della Graces' photographs is, that they do not resemble the simulated homosexual scenarios that aim at the heterosexual male voyeur. The way the women in her photographs relate to each other, and the way the viewer is permitted to participate in this dynamics makes it very clear, that the closure of the circuit of desire does not require a male spectator who fantasises himself into the scene. One of the reasons for this is that the depicted women are often 'equipped' with a variety of phallic instruments with which they penetrate their partners or themselves. In her work *Hermaphrodyké* (figure 32) we see Grace being penetrated in 'doggy-style' by a woman who is girded with a dildo. The interesting moment of this photograph is the fact that Grace is at the same time photographer and photographed object. She is holding the release-bulb of her cable release between her teeth which allows her to choose the moment of the interaction with her partner which she wants to capture on film.[425] What might look like the worst exploitation and degrading behaviour takes on a different meaning because of the fact, that the scene is set up for Grace's

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[424] Susie Bright, *Nothing but the Girl. The Blatant Lesbian Image.* Edited by Susie Bright and Jill Posener. 9.

[425] Looking at *Hermaphrodyké* immediately reminds us of the infamous image by Robert Mapplethorpe *Self-portrait* (figure 33), where he inserts the tip of the shaft of a leather whip into his anus. Body posture, the head turned towards the camera, the self-confident gaze at the viewer and the use of a cable release are the same features as in Grace's image. (See Arthur C. Danto, *Playing With the Edge. The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe*, 58-9.)

own camera (gaze). Besides, if one considers the difference between reality and fantasy in the visual field, one might be able to imagine the liberating effect of such a scenario.

> Getting fucked', as social parlance, certainly means getting the short end of the stick. But literally, 'getting fucked' can be a fulfilling and commanding experience. It is nothing more than macho prejudice to equate sexual submission with weakness or inferiority.[426]

The performative element in Grace's photographs which strongly differs from a non-participating, documentary approach is an indication that she accepts the fact that even in lesbian relationships it is impossible to eliminate power-relations. Instead of ignoring or suppressing the fact that female homosexuality is also marked by in-equality, phallic desire, power-interests, aggression, obscenity, deviant behaviour etc., Grace stages them in her playful performances in order to eliminate their stigma of being unnatural, non-feminine and politically incorrect. For her, this is also an opportunity to try things out which can result in heightened self-awareness and self-esteem, even if they are negative experiences. "S/M taught me a lot about sex, and how to speak about it, and how to say what I wanted; but at other times, I would put myself in situations where I would be bottoming quite heavily just to experience it, and getting alienated."[427] Her photographic work also contains images that do not deal explicitly with lesbian sexuality, but could instead be called 'portraits', 'nudes', 'picture-stories', snap-shots etc. What they all have in common is that they are produced in the same uncompromising visual language, which leaves no doubt that she is not aiming at the heterosexual voyeur, but trying to show women a number of alternative ways to experience and talk about their sexuality and social identity. No matter what the subject of her images is, the depicted women always show great pride in what they do and what they look like, despite the politically incorrect poses, expressions, and gestures. The relatively straightforward modernist coolness of her aesthetics is sometimes interspersed with slightly 'warmer' sepia and blue-toned images that seem to evoke feelings of tenderness, love and intimacy. Yet, the strong black and white contrast prevails in those images which clearly convey the message that among lesbians too, sexuality and (emotional) intimacy are not necessarily linked. The photographs are statements about the right to act out a homosexuality that is not restrained by any preconceived notions of lesbianism, womanhood, gay desire etc. Interestingly, for Grace this liberalism is closely linked to her concept of the photographer as a director rather than a documentalist. Telling a model to be herself, to be natural, to relax, to just be, is as unnatural and loaded with cultural meaning as any formally staged pose. In fact, it is a sign of taking

[426] Susie Bright, *Nothing but the Girl.* Edited by Susie Bright and Jill Posener. 9.

responsibility if a photographer does not hide behind a presumably 'innocent' non-intrusiveness. Believing that a completely neutral approach is possible and desirable is "a way of disowning the power of the relationship between the photographer and the photographed."[428] In Grace's images the models might be the objects of the photographer's gaze but they are either looking straight back at her (the camera) or their posing and acting is done with so much confidence and forced exhibitionism that it becomes impossible to speak of them as overpowered victims of the photographer-voyeur. The images are marked by an unapologetic frankness and artificiality, combined with a neo-modernist coolness that underpins the strength of the hard-core biker butch, and the (androgynous) beauty of the lesbian 'femme fatale' and female macho-type.

7.7 Robert Frank

I now intend to discuss the images of another contemporary photographer whose career can be divided into three relatively separate phases. It is the work of the Swiss-born photographer Robert Frank who, in the early fifties, immigrated to the USA where a few years later he became a 'hero' of the 'Beat Generation' with his first photo-book *The Americans*, which marked a significant break with modernist photo aesthetics. The idea behind *The Americans* was to create a photographic 'poem' or 'song' in order to work through the mass of new impressions which Frank encountered in his new environment. Between 1955 and 1957, supported by a Guggenheim scholarship, Frank travelled through the USA and exposed almost a thousand rolls of black and white film, from which he carefully selected 83 images that make up *The Americans*. First published in 1958 in France and a year later at Grove Press (New York) with an introduction by Jack Kerouac, it was perceived by parts of the American public with great enthusiasm while the more conservative majority reacted with harsh critique and bitter rejection.

In order to understand Frank's work from the seventies through to the nineties it is important to become aware of the broader effects of this first book that quickly received the status of a cult-object that appealed to a wide audience of avant-garde artists. Frank's laconic remarks on his project to photographically approach the overtly visible contradictions of the American dream show a significant break with the journalistic photo-aesthetics of the times (e.g. *Magnum* and *Life-Magazine*), and the politically inspired documentary photography in the

[427] Della Grace, *Nothing but the Girl*. Edited by Susie Bright and Jill Posener. 59.

style of Dorothea Lange, Lewis Hine or Walker Evans. His photo-aesthetics was not based on the rigorous search for spectacular and obviously meaningful situations but on the careful perception of, and contemplation about events of the bleak normality and everyday. "I speak of the things that are there, anywhere and everywhere - easily found, not easily selected and interpreted."[429] Frank opposed the mainly market-orientated *Life-Magazine* philosophy (whose main aim was to satisfy the desire of a mass audience for unusual, sensationalistic and voyeuristic photographs) with something one could call an 'aesthetics of inconsequentiality'. Equipped with a small 35mm Leica he took photos whose technical 'flaws' regarding exposure, framing and focus can again be understood as an implicit critique of the tendency or obligation of traditional photojournalism to achieve technical perfection. The photography critic Peter Turner remarks: "What I did know is that you had pierced the sham and hypocrisy of the Life magazine picture-story style and spoke in a way that was convincing when Life was not. Somehow I trusted you but mistrusted them."[430] Alluding to Barthes' structuralist terminology Turner also speaks of a new vocabulary, an original grammar and a fresh syntax of the photographic language which emerged from Frank's disrespect for the rules and principles of the dominant photographic schools of the times.

Although *The Americans* is formally divided into four chapters, Frank repeatedly stated (and the majority of the critics who discussed his 'photo-essay' followed his opinion) that it is just one long sequence whose 'content' has neither beginning nor end, that it lacks a dramatic climax and that its message is many-layered, ambivalent and sometimes contradictory. Therefore the images can be read only by taking into account their metonymical (serial) character, which links every single one of them with all the eighty-two others. The main allegation of the harsh critique that Frank's book encountered was, that *The Americans* did not represent a complete description of the US-American society but only a small and malicious selection of events and situations which portray its negative sides. Even though it is true that Frank was not prepared to look away in moments when the 'official' symbols and representatives of wealth, power and democracy showed their 'ugly faces', it is a misconception to think that *The Americans* is based on Frank's hatred of, and disgust for, his new environment. One only has to look at the beauty, grace and pride he discovered in underprivileged social classes, subcultures and a number of other minorities. *The Americans*

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[428] Grace, *Nothing but the Girl.* Edited by Susie Bright and Jill Posener. 120

[429] Robert Frank, "Robert Frank: Truth, Not So Much Art." *NZ Journal of Photography*, Spring 1995, 9.

[430] Peter Turner, "An open letter to Robert Frank." *NZ Journal of Photography*, Spring 1995, 9.
Turner's phrase 'you had pierced the sham and hypocrisy ...' seems to have a similar meaning as Barthes' characterisation of the *punctum*, for which he also uses the term 'piercing'. (I)t is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me." (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26.)

should rather be understood as a cry for help from someone in despair, who has not completely given up his faith in the healing and transformational powers of the arts.[431] Hence *The Americans* is neither an objective travel-diary, nor a complete and representative documentation of a particular society, but instead the spontaneous result of a subjective reaction to a situation which fascinated and alienated Frank at the same time. The fact that his critics were only able to see an attempt to criticise and destroy commonly accepted and established values says more about the frailness and maraude state of these values than about the intentions which might have been at the base of Frank's project.

A lot of the things we have said about Jeff Jacobson's photographs are also true for Frank's photo-essay from 1958. These congruencies and similarities are no surprise because very quickly *The Americans* became a paradigm for a whole generation of film makers, photographers, poets and other artists. In the works of both photographers we find a strong awareness of the fact that journalistic and documentary photography is never free from subjective, unconscious, arbitrary and random influences.

In my view the sequential structure of *The Americans* is the starting point for an analysis of Frank's later photographic practise. The individual images in *The Americans* lack the meaningfulness and autarchy of sense which is such an essential element in most modernist photography. Although throughout the history of photography images have always been presented in sequences (e.g. in the form of books), the individual photographs could also have 'existed' on their own. Irrespective whether it is a landscape by Ansel Adams, a beautiful object or event of the everyday by Alfred Stieglitz, a social portrait by August Sander or a decisive moment by Henry Cartier-Bresson, to some extent the sense of the photograph already exists before it is taken. For someone who knows the historical schools and genre of photography it is not only easy to identify a certain image as 'a Steichen', 'a Man Ray', 'a Weston' but also to explain its general meaning just by knowing that it belongs to that specific genre, school or master works. However, postmodern photography has reversed this dynamics by taking Garry Winogrand's statement as a dictum, that his main motive to photograph is his desire to know what things look like when they are photographed.[432] This leads to surprising effects, non-sense, contradictions, unspectacular images and a whole number of other unforeseeable effects that are caused by the specific structure of the medium photography.

The eighty three photographs of *The Americans* often depict scenes of a banal everyday, packaged in an aesthetics of a dark, brutal and sad, yet poetically beautiful realism which also

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[431] See Sarah Greenough, "Fragments That Make a Whole Meaning in Photographic Sequences." Frank, *Moving Out*, 116.

[432] See Clarke, *The Photograph*, 216.

had a strong impact on 'Film Noire' (figures 34-38). The most remarkable characteristic of *The Americans* is that the individual images are not 'self-sufficient' but make sense only in connection with the whole sequence.

> Frank (...) knew that only a sequence made up of one long rambling sentence, could catalyze and sustain the experience he wished to convey, and only a sequence would allow him to address the multiple, occasionally contradictory, and often allusive feelings that formed his perception of America. (...) It is a sequence that does not cleanly and logically progress from beginning to end, but, like our perception of reality, at times doubles back on itself and at other points makes perplexing leaps forward. (...) It is a sequence with an emphatic voice and tone, but whose specific meaning is intentionally slippery and open to numerous interpretations. Finally, it is a sequence with a distinct, intense order that nullifies explanation.[433]

One could also call *The Americans* a photographic narration, poem or song that lacks a read thread, a meaningful super-structure and a general story-line. Photographs with a strong symbolic meaning are often contrasted by literal, quiet, empty, fragmented and senseless images and even though it might sound paradoxical, in Frank's anti-aesthetics they are all part of a formal and structural rapport.

In this context it seems important to consider two questions which are relevant for the understanding of Frank's later works. Firstly: In what moment does photographic meaning come about? Secondly: What kind of relation does exist between the meaning of a photo and the concept of visual truth? In philosophical terms one could understand *The Americans* as a 'hermeneutic circle'. The eighty three photographs make sense only if one looks at them as a sequence, although a sequence that is made up of fragments which are not held together by a unifying principle. Therefore the question remains of how to think the leap from the fragments to the unity of sense of the whole sequence? To resolve this problem it seems helpful to consider once again Derrida's 'lecture' about the photographs of Marie-Françoise Plissart where he spoke the following intangible paradox: In order to find sense in the photographic images we have to invent stories, yet these stories (philosophical treaties, art-historical analyses, anthropological interpretations etc.) can only produce relative truths because it remains undecided which of the different discourses is representing the essential meaning of the photographs in question. Derrida wanted to deconstruct the concepts 'essential meaning' and 'photographic truth' in general, which is why he finished his lecture with the

[433] Greenough, "Fragments That Make a Whole Meaning in Photographic Sequences." Frank, *Moving Out*. 116.

remark that all the images and the accompanying comments might just have been a dreamed primal scene or a fantasy that flared up for a short moment behind closed eyelids. In a similar fashion it is possible to understand *The Americans* too as a (day-) dream, that was spun forth by Frank for nearly two years.

In Barthes' structuralist texts from the eighties one can also find formal analogies to the lack of structure in *The Americans*, which are both based on a concept of the fragment, that is only vaguely connected with the other text pieces. What is lacking is a strictly rational link between the individual elements of which the text or the photo sequence consists of. The same is true for the titles of Barthes' texts (*Pleasure of the Text*, *Roland Barthes*, *Camera Lucida*) which are mere allusions to an otherwise non-existent thematic unity.

The text *Roland Barthes* is made up of a very similar 'patch-work' of various structural levels and contexts, which is why it is not an autobiography in the traditional sense, even though it provides us with some 'objective' facts from Barthes' life (information about certain places and times that had significant effects on his life). Apart from that, it is an unstructured conglomerate of theory-fragments from philosophy and literary criticism, quotations from his favourite literary classics, fantasies, daydreams and 'confessions' of transgressive and socially unacceptable wishes and desires. And the meaning of it? I believe it is self-evident that the sense is not only located in the work itself or in Barthes' intentions, but also in us readers, viz. at the moment when we connect to the many ends and knots, breaks and frays of the story line.

In this same sense Frank's *The Americans* can best be understood as an unsystematic, autobiographic, documentary and fantasy-like narration whose sense is made up anew each time the viewer invests it with her or his own subjective associations and cultural preconceptions. Therefore it is not totally wrong when Frank's critics claim that for them his images express a disparagement of commonly accepted social and political values, although it is obvious that this negative outlook is not a specific characteristic of the pictures themselves. It is no question that Frank's images are open to such interpretation, since his independent and unprejudiced position of the newly immigrated allowed him, to include in his photo-essay the gloomy side of the otherwise polished appearance of the 'American way of life'. The distance between him and his photographic objects made it possible to draw a portrait of the US-American society which shows its beautiful as well as its ugly sides. One could also say that in Frank's pictures, beauty and ugliness exist side by side without reconciliation.

Here, we should briefly recall what Barthes says at the beginning of *The Pleasure of the Text*?

> Imagine someone (a kind of Monsieur Teste in reverse) who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old spectre: logical contradiction; who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity; (...) Such a man would be the mockery of our society: court, school, asylum, polite conversation would cast him out: who endures contradiction without shame?[434]

The Americans is full of contradictions in regard to its aesthetics, content and formal structure, which is why it is no surprise that Frank's critics have always tried to push him into the position of the underdog. Interestingly this outsider position also became the starting point for his 'disciples' who assigned him with the status of an avant-garde role model. Although this position was as alien to Frank as the one assumed by his critics, who saw in him a foolish cretin who was 'throwing dirt' at the foreign land, culture and its people.

The success of *The Americans* had not only positive effects for Frank because it also stirred up his distrust of the many modes in which the normality of the everyday attempts to assimilate and commercialise avant-garde movements. This is also one of the reasons why he completed only one other photographic project after *The Americans* ('The bus series' 1958/59) and then took up film making for the next ten years before coming back to photography with a different aesthetic approach. One could thus formulate that the serial moment of *The Americans* and the abandonment of the meaningful individual image naturally led Frank into film making. This is also an important feature of his later photographic works, of which most are made up of a number of photographs that are accompanied by text and abstract drawings. Some of the key terms that can help us to understand the often very complex and difficult images come from the way psychoanalysis is interpreting dreams: condensation and overdetermination. While the photographs of *The Americans* are spread over the pages of a whole book, the serial moment in Frank's later works is mostly condensed on one page (a single image). One could thus conclude that the spaces of *The Americans*, occupied by the single photographic fragments are compressed and overlaid onto one page in his later works. The images can therefore be visually perceived at one glance. The time factor which, in *The Americans* is of such importance for the unfolding of sense and the creation of links between the images, remains in later photographic works such as *Mabou*, *Andrea* (figure 39), *Mute/Blind* (figure 40), *End of Dream*, *Yellow Flower - Like A Dog* (figure 41) and *About Fate*.

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[434] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 3.

Although the condensed image can be comprehended at a glance, meaning originates only through the successive linking of its individual elements (photography, text, graphic) for which there are no formal rules. The beginning and end of this overview as well as the insertion of pauses and repetitions are not controlled by Frank's intentions. "In his later works, though, such as Mabou or Untitled and Mute/Blind, it is as if he has condensed and collapsed time. Like an archaeological site, they consist of layers of time literally and metaphorically piled on top of each other. They merge past and present (...)".[435] The relative inconsequentiality of the motifs, the tendency towards abstraction and especially the lack of technical perfection which were already visible in his earlier work, become the most significant aesthetic qualities of Frank's later images. It is especially interesting that the artistic drive and the diversity of meanings of his photographic works is directly affected by this change of attitude. The less realistic and meaningful his motifs are, the greater the possibilities to combine them with his other stylistic elements (text and graphic).

It is important though to be aware of the fact that Frank's abolishment of a realistic and descriptive photographic style generates a different kind of abstractness than, for example, the abstract nudes of Bill Brandt (1940s), the abstract structures and patterns of plants in the images by Karl Blossfeldt (1920s) or the abstract landscapes of Brett Weston (1960s). Despite the obvious differences between these three photographers one can still sense something like a search for beauty and harmony in the abstract as the common basis of their modernist work. In contrast to this approach, Frank's abstract style expresses a shocking banality and directness through its uncompromising appeal to the real.

The photographs of which many are taken in the harsh and weathered coastal environment of his home in Mabou, Nova Scotia in Canada, show time and again the same trivial and mundane objects which demand of the viewer to put them in a wider context. Rotten fence posts, telephone masts, everyday household equipment, half-wilted flowers, people who got lost in the isolated area, and the view over the harsh coastal line out onto the rough sea which in winter is frozen and covered with snow. This is the raw material of many of his later montages, collages and sequences.[436]

Frank handles this raw material with even less care than the photos of *The Americans* which is why they do not only show the usual technical flaws (blur, compositional imbalance,

[435] Greenough, "Fragments That Make a Whole Meaning in Photographic Sequences." Frank, *Moving Out*. 121.

[436] Frank's obviously profane photographs are still very different from, for example, the influential German avant-garde aesthetics of the post-war years, which pursued the conscious confrontation with the ugliness and greyness of the average person's everyday routine.

distortion, under- and overexposure) but furthermore a mistreatment of the material base of the photographs.

> Frank is notorious for treating his negatives like last week's grocery lists - he handles prints just as casually - so that a negative is 'worked', exposed, for a long time after the initial, sanctuary exposure in the camera. He cultivates a damaged beauty in order to bring into a strong compositional structure the decisive random impingements of the world. This is another expression of contrariness, his unwillingness to monumentalize moments or court transcendent effects.[437]

In general one could say that, irrespective of the photographic school or technique, the spotless print and its lasting preservation has been an essential principle of photography ever since its invention. Even the photographic explorers and experimenters of the Bauhaus, Surrealism and Dadaism widely accepted the norm of the intactness of the material base of their chaotic, abstract and fragmented collages. It was Frank together with Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and a few others who were the first to understand the far-reaching implications of the violation of this principle in regard to the meaning of the depicted objects. Frank's attack on the surface of the photographic image comprises roughly three different 'methods' which are: a) crumbling, tearing, scratching, layering and gluing photographs together; b) painting, staining, besmirching with paint, blood or dirt and, c) inscribing and marking them with text. It is clear that Frank's patchy images (which sometimes contain a large number of individual photographs) express his refusal to subscribe to photography's inherent tendency to idealise and beautify the depicted objects. "Frank is an artist who takes what is available, finds the chaos in it, then finds a way of using the chaos (...) to make something that is not a beautiful picture."[438]

The more radical aesthetics of his later works is also a reaction against the genre 'street photography' of which *The Americans* was one of the founding 'statements'. Despite its unconventional and subversive effects, it still contained a certain sense of beauty and harmony, present in some of the images in the form of a sweet melancholy and self-pitying resignation. In contrast, many of his later works are dealing with themes like sadness and loss, separation and illness, missed chances and lack of hope without any pacifying gestures or aesthetical compensations. They also lack the cultural filters which usually block all visual perceptions that do not fit into a unified and harmonious depiction of reality. On first sight

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[437] W.S. Di Piero, "Hold Still - Keep Going. The Later Photographs." Frank, *Moving Out*, 274.
[438] Di Piero, "Hold Still - Keep Going. The Later Photographs." Frank, *Moving Out*, 273.

many of Frank's photographs appear raw and awkward, demanding from the viewer a considerable amount of patience and initiative in order to find access to the images.

One could formulate that Frank's works which are made up of a number of relatively uniform images (depicting the same motif in slightly different ways), show very clearly that there is an essential difference between the synthesis of a number of visual impressions and the formation of an integral or whole image in the Lacanian sense. In contrast to the photo-sequences in the tradition of the nineteenth century experimenters[439], Frank did not intend to explore the formation of an integral visual impression. His sequences are not bound to any rules and their purpose is not to analyse the structure of the depicted objects, despite the fact that words and text are an important part of his montages. One such example is his image *Mabou* (figure 42) that consists of eight photographs of which two are showing the same electricity mast and the other six the same fence post from slightly different perspectives, yet always in front of the same barren background of a piece of the sea, the bleak and cloudy sky and a bit of the coastline. Irrespective of the image one chooses to begin viewing and in what order one views the others, it remains a seemingly senseless sequence.

Although it might sound paradoxical, *Mabou* is an excellent example of how difficult it is to produce a meaningless or senseless photograph. It is not likely that Frank was primarily concerned about the electricity mast or the fence post. They are mundane objects, photographed without artistry and printed with great carelessness. Yet one might ask whether there is sense in the text that is written straight onto the print: *For Andrea who died 1954-1974*? Although here again the question arises whether there is any coherent and determinable connection between image and text? The death of Frank's daughter Andrea, who was killed at the age of twenty one in an aeroplane crash, is a frequently recurring motive in his works, but none of the images represents a thematically coherent connection between text and image. There is nothing that informs us about Andrea, her personality, upbringing and life, or about Franks state of mind and emotions, at least not in traditional photographic terms, such as specific poses, objects or symbols. Despite the lack of meaning and sense, these images convey feelings of the most dreadful sadness, hopelessness and the painful knowledge of an irretrievable loss.

> The garish mournfulness of images associated with Andrea, for instance, display grief but do not invite us into their aura; they offer no welcoming,

[439] The best known example for this approach is Edward Muybridge's photographic study *Animal Locomotion* from 1887. For the first time in history he recorded the successive movements of, for example, a galloping horse and a swan taking of, that had not been analysed up until then because of the limitations of the human eye to break down the continuous flow of such rapid movements into sequences.

> consoling gestures. This is part of the ceremoniousness of the late work generally, an aloofness that defines more acutely, and with a jagged intensity unequalled by anything in the early work, a disordered spirit and chaotic mood.[440]

Frank is playing in an artful way with our non-suppressible desire to see sense in the senseless photographic material. It is as if the viewer is trapped by the many associative links between the photographs and the laconic text.

In *Camera Lucida* Barthes comments on a famous image by the photographer Andre Kertész (The Puppy. Paris, 1928) which shows a little boy looking into the camera with an expression of great anxiety and care for the puppy that he holds in his hands: "He is looking at nothing; he retains within himself his love and his fear: that is the Look..."[441] I think it is possible to use the same words in order to characterise Frank's gaze through the viewfinder of his camera at the above mentioned mundane objects, the unmasked and non-posing people and the barren landscapes. Frank does not see what he is looking at, because he too retains his love and fear within himself. This dynamics could also be described in terms of the Lacanian screen, which is relevant especially for an understanding of the texts and painted structures that are added to the photographs. In this sense Frank's linguistic expressions and the drawings are emanations from the position of the tableau, which now appear on the opaque screen, i.e. the photograph. This would also explain why the concrete and realistic qualities of the photographed objects become less and less important. Truth in the field of visual perception and thus in photography can neither be found in the external, determinable and culturally significant objects nor in the personal attitudes, preferences, wishes and intentions of the seeing or photographing subject, but in the intensity of the gaze that is present in an image. To further explain this difficult concept I would like to quote the introductory sentence of *Camera Lucida*: "One day, quite some time ago, I happened on a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852. And I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor'."[442]

In 1977 Frank created an image entitled *Mabou Winter Footage* (figure 43) which represents this gaze in the image in an almost literal way. The whole piece is made up of a sequence of seven photographs, of which each shows a human eye in its centre, superimposed on a stretch of the coastline of Mabou. The only difference between the seven double-exposures is a slightly altered illumination of the eyes. It does not seem to make sense to search for a definite

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[440] Di Piero, "Hold Still - Keep Going. The Later Photographs". Frank, *Moving Out*, 277.
[441] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 114.
[442] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 3.

meaning of this image, which is why the only way to engage in it is to let one's eyes wander between the seven fragments to create links, or else to stand back to get an overall impression which might lead to a subjective narrative. In Frank's video *Home Improvements*, made eight years after *Mabou Winter Footage*, we find a statement that can be understood as a comment on this photographic montage. It is an expression of his belief that photographic truth is possible only at the border between image and screen. "I'm always looking outside, trying to look inside. Trying to say something that's true. But maybe nothing is really true. Except what's out there. And what's out there is always changing."[443]

The important function of the text-fragment in Frank's later works can also be understood in terms of Foucault's concept of representation in regard to Magritte's paintings. Text and image never totally correspond, i.e. the text does not explain the image and vice versa, the image does not illustrate the text. "The trap shattered on emptiness: image and text fall each to its own side, of their own weight. No longer do they have a common ground nor a place where they can meet, where words are capable of taking shape and images of entering into lexical order."[444] Another example of Frank's ability to use the inevitable in-congruence between word and image for his art is the work titled *Andrea, Mabou* (figure 44), which is made up of four photographs and the word 'Andrea' inscribed on one of them. Three of the images show different views of the coastline (two of them with electricity mast), the forth a man's head and torso, holding up an old painting of a sailing boat. Obviously there is no rational explanation for the link between text and image because the text "Andrea" (if one can call it a text at all) does not say anything else than the name of Frank's daughter. The same is true for the work *Zoe, Juin 21* (figure 45) which shows the blurred traces of wild flowers moving in the wind, and the words written onto it: "Pour La Fille". A third example is *Sick of Good By's* (figure 46) which is made up of two photographs of mirrors, on which is written in scrawly handwriting "Sick of good By's". The upper image also shows an arm which holds a doll in front of the mirror while in the lower image we see another, smaller mirror standing in front of the bigger one. In all these examples it seems impossible to make sense of the relation between text and image. These photographic montages and sequences, which at first sight appear meaningless and sometimes repulsive, must be understood as dream images and perhaps even psychosis-like hallucinations, where the bleak realism of artless and fragmentary black and white images collides with outbursts of overwhelmingly painful thoughts about death, loneliness and the irreversible course of time. The images are obviously taken in Frank's immediate surroundings, which might provide us with an idea of the 'origin' of the

[443] Frank, *Moving Out*, 12.

accompanying texts, the screaming voices and mournful crying. Since Frank was never searching for motifs beyond what 'was there anyway', it seems likely that the same is true for his texts. It is as if he had found them with his 'mind's eye' just as they were passing by, uncensored, not intellectualised, and filled with conflicting desires.

Frank is a master of creating suspense in his images through the combination of raw and unglamorous photographs with laconic, brutal and sometimes naive-ridiculous slogans ('shouting for help', morning, talking to himself), which are in most of the cases not related to the depicted objects. Furthermore, one could say that all his works express a strong sense of suspicion about using photography in order to re-present (to bring back to life) the depicted object. Frank's general aesthetic attitude is an expression of Barthes' 'banal' insight that photography is unable to say anything else than "that has been."[445] The resulting resignation is not only visible in the works in memory of Andrea, but in all the images in which he refers to the impossibility to retrieve important past moments of his life, whether they are hopes, dreams, missed chances, moments of love and happiness or the places where he had lived and worked. That also explains the increasing abstract quality of his photographs, which is almost a symbol of the impossibility to re-present the past. Therefore, the past existence of his daughter is a banality which does not need to be confirmed by a realistic and truthful photographic image of her.

In a similar way, his work *About Fate, Mabou, Nova Scotia* (figure 47) which has as its subject matter the death of a young boy, does not include a photograph of the child. The sequence, made up of seven mistreated polaroid images and a short text written directly onto the photos, is again a very complex condensation of a variety of motifs, of which some could be related to the life of a young boy. They show us glass-marbles, a toy-car, some 'Indian-feathers', a plastic bear, as well as a vase with a wilted flower, an old photographic postcard and the drawing of an eye. Except for the subtle allusions to the fantasies of a young child, the photographs are not thematically connected. The short text reads:

> ABOUT FATE DURING THE NIGHT OF MAY 19TH 1987 AN 11 YEAR OLD BOY CLIMBED INTO THE CAGE OF THE POLAR BEARS AT THE BROOKLYN ZOO. THE BEARS KILLED AND ATE THE BOY THE POLICE SHOT THE TWO POLAR BEARS for Michael.[446]

As we have said, some of the photos might be allusions to the fantasy of a young boy, and the plastic-polar bear is a relatively straightforward representation of an element of the real event,

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[444] Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 28.
[445] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 115.
[446] Frank, *Moving Out*, 134-135.

yet in the end it remains indeterminable what specific message Frank tried to convey. The short text, written in a journalistic style (except for the first two words "ABOUT FATE" and the dedication "for Michael"), stands in sharp contrast to the poetic, quiet, slightly abstract and unconnected photographs. This is another example of a work where the text does not explain the images and, vice versa, the images do not fully illustrate the text. Frank avoids to confront us with 'shock-photos' of, for example, the remains of the killed boy, the polar bears dripping with blood, the horrified witnesses or the grieving parents etc. Instead he leads us into a visual 'space' which is strangely rapt from the tragic event of which we know only through the text.
In regard to the relation between text and image, Foucault said that "(i)t is there, on these few millimetres of white, the calm sand of the page, that are established all the relations of designation, nomination, description, classification."[447] In conclusion one can say that Frank's images are going against these conventions, because the text fragments never match the images. In the end one can only guess what his intentions are. Whether he wants to show us specific things of the depicted objects, tell us something about reality or to express his subjective feelings and thoughts.

7.8 Mike and Doug Starn (The Starn-Twins)

Discussing the photographic works of Mike and Doug Starn means to finally leave the sphere of the journalistic and documentary image. Frank's later pictures though are still a valid starting point for an understanding of some of the stylistic and aesthetic elements in the works of the Starns.
The final works of the three photographers are often made up of a large number of individual photographic images. In Frank's case though, most of these fragments depict different motifs (different objects, persons, abstract shapes), whereas in the Starns' works the assembled fragments often make up one large image. Because of their size and material quality, Frank's pictures are well suited to be presented in the form of a book, whereas the Starns' large format photographs, which are also often unconventionally framed, require large walls in museums and art-galleries to fully develop their artistic effects. In contrast to the modernist norm to present the image at eye-level, in a succession from left to right and in a 'cold' geometrical order, the Starns' exhibitions show a more or less 'structured' chaos which is similar to last century's so called 'saloon style'. The most significant characteristic of this style is that all

[447] Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, 28.

levels of the walls are used to present the images without concern about similar formats, motifs and contents. In the same way as Frank forces the viewer's gaze to wander between the vaguely connected elements of his pictures, the Starns' images and their special presentation require that the viewer wanders along the gallery walls in order to get an overall impression.

Although the Starns' photographs show some vague themes and aesthetic leitmotifs, they are too unspecific and ambiguous in order to infer an underlying principle. Even the concept 'art-photography', at least in its modernist sense, is unable to comprise the variety of motifs and stylistic elements of their work. The opposite is the case because Mike and Doug Starn's images represent the most radical attempt to break free from the habits and norms of modernist art-photography. In my view this is most visible in the Starns' uncompromising disrespect for the material basis of their photographs (negative, print, frame) and in the arbitrary and naive-unconcerned references to a large number of art-historical epochs and styles. One could characterise their artistic attitude with the postmodern dictum 'recycling instead of inventing'.

The Starns have made a number of comments about their artistic ideas which closely mirror Frank's programmatic remarks on his photographic practice. "The image means nothing to us, in a sense. It's just exciting to look at."[448] Whereas Frank remarked: "It isn't in the pictures, (...) the pictures are a necessity: you do them. And then the way you present them, and the way you put them together - it can strengthen the simpleness of the visual series, image, whatever."[449]

The same holds true for the Starns' works which are also results of random experiments about the way the images can be altered and presented. Their artistic appeal is an effect of the Starns' endless attempts to go through the infinite ways of combining different photographic elements. The assessment whether the outcome has an effect on the viewer, or whether the image remains 'silent' is the last part of the whole photographic process. This is at the same time an attempt to subvert modernist photographic practices by either cancelling the parameters 'intention', 'selection' and 'authority', or at least putting them at the end of the whole process. This attitude is also visible in the Starns' work environment which consists of four different areas; - a darkroom, a wood workshop for the production of the frames, an assembly and exhibition space and an office. Because of the size of their works it is no surprise that the assembly and exhibition space takes up the largest part of the former truck-garage. In a slightly exaggerated way one could say that the meaning or message of the images originates during that last part of the artistic process which could best be described in

[448] Doug Starn, *Mike and Doug Starn*, 23.

terms of a circular movement or 'coming-back-to-oneself' that follows the spontaneous, intuitive and uncoordinated dynamics of the former work steps. In other words, the Starns see themselves neither as sender (author) of their photographic messages, nor as their receivers or interpreters, even though their images are also always addressed to themselves.

It seems relatively irrelevant how we label the end-product of their artistic work, e.g. as creative genius, as 'the Other' of their conscious selves or as the inherent 'semantic' effects of the medium photography because each of their works confronts them with something alien or unknown to them. The photo-critic Andy Grundberg writes that

> (a)fter finishing *Dark Portrait*, the Starns looked it over and put it away. 'We hated it,' they remember feeling. But they also knew they had done something, something that was not the same as David Hockney's panoramic assemblages of snapshots, or Bernd and Hilla Becher's repetitive grids of industrial structures, or Chuck Close and Lucas Samaras's larger-than-life Polaroid portraits. Months later they brought out *Dark Portrait* and looked it over again.[450]

This is a process that can be understood in similar terms as the gradual dawning of consciousness in a psychoanalytical context. The 'abnormal' psychological symptoms 'belong' to the respective person even though s/he experiences them as alien and foreign. However, one difference between artist and neurotic is that the former engages voluntarily in his/her business, i.e. even though the content or meaning of the final artefact might be a random, unpleasant, frightening, foreign result of his/her preoccupations, personal preferences and experiences, the overall process is a controlled and self-initiated one.

The most significant element of the Starns' photographic work is the consequent refusal to produce technical perfection. Whenever they encounter an opportunity to subvert the frictionless production of photographs, the Starns come up with a simple yet effective mechanism. This is also a reminder of the fact that they are still 'man-made' objects despite their technical aspects. That might also explain why in their works, photography's objectivity is almost of no importance any more. In terms of artistic appeal photographs are often more interesting when they do not meet the viewer's expectation to be confronted with a realistic depiction of a scene or object. As long as the image is still a photograph (in the Barthesian sense) one will always be compelled to ask: What does the photo depict or represent and what is the context of the photographed object? Which part of the image is an effect of the

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[449] Frank, *Robert Frank*, 119-20.

[450] Andy Grundberg, "Mike and Doug Starn, in Mike and Doug Starn, *Mike and Doug Starn*. 34.

photographer's additions? The moment when photographs evoke these kinds of questions they become psycho-active.[451]

The work *Horses* (figure 48) is a good example of the Starns' belief that the photograph or motif as such is of no special importance, because its main function is to provide the raw material for the various manipulations and alterations. *Horses* was commissioned by the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art and consists of one hundred individual photographs which are all prints of the same negative. The depicted objects are the heads of two horses which are both looking into the same direction. Even though the one hundred prints are all of the same negative, they all differ from each other because of the ways they were printed and processed. The variations are the result of a combination of many technical and aesthetical manipulations, and although some of these techniques (toner, collage, negative-print, sequencing) have always been standard repertory of modernist photography, their unconventional combination and uncompromising application transforms their normal effects into the typical Starnian look.

There is one ever present element in the Starns' works which is generic to postmodern aesthetics, viz. the above mentioned disrespect for, and violation of, the perfect surface of the photographic negative and print. Scratches, dust marks, rips and cracks, over- and underexposure, incomplete developing and fixing of film and paper, uneven toning, cutting and pasting fragments, random solarisation, exposing the back side of the photo-paper and exposing the printing paper to chemicals and light before projecting the negative image, are just some of their alternative photographic techniques.

Another important part of the Starns' creative work is the editing, assemblage, framing and exhibition of their images. One could even say that the 'post-photographic' practices represent some of their most radical attempts to expose and deconstruct the restrictive norms of modernist photography. Even if it sounds banal, it is important to emphasise that Mike and Doug Starn are still working with the medium photography despite their negative attitude towards technical perfection, determinable meaning, harmonious composition and originality. Hence it would be wrong to presume that the motive for subverting and violating these traditional concepts is to abolish or 'destroy' photography. The fascinating feature of their work is that they criticise photography through photographs, which might be understood as an example of Derrida's deconstructive slogan "use it, don't accuse it". Thus each of their multidimensional images is proof of the fact, that the deconstruction of traditional photographic practices does not result in the collapse of the medium but can instead lead to

[451] See Lockhart, "A Sense of Menace." Jacobson, *My Fellow Americans*, sixth page, second column.

more artistic freedom. "The only way for the creative mind to function is through anarchy. Art can't flourish while bound to the concerns of previous generations. Photography, as a rule, has too many rules."[452] The anarchy of the Starns' images is one of the main reasons why they are far more interesting and fascinating to look at than the realistic depiction of an object or scene in the modernist tradition.

One of the Starns' most elaborate and aesthetically sophisticated post-photographic manipulations is the assemblage of the many differently shaped, toned, cut and tattered fragments of which their images consist of. At one point of this chaotic and anarchic process though, an arbitrary order originates which becomes an integral part of the respective image. Because the Starns' photographs often resemble the unconscious and 'out-of-focus' impressions of our 'worldview', the fragmentary quality of their works can also be understood as a metaphor for the successive character of visual perception.

The obvious post-photographic manipulations and the equally noticeable lack of ambition to present us 'worthwhile' or extraordinary motifs indicates a considerable degree of serenity on the side of the Starns, because they seem to be aware that the main source for the meaning or message in their images is its material base. Therefore one could formulate that the real scene or medium of their photographic practice is the negative, the print and the frame. However, it is important to notice that in a negative sense, the motif too is important for the meaning of their images, because even in the Starns' most abstract works, the various manipulations and alterations do not completely erase the photographic element. If the Starns call their images photographs, there must remain at least a hypothetical link to the 'out there', the external world of objects.[453]

It might be helpful to recall once again Barthes' characterisation of photography as "(a) sort of umbilical cord,"[454] because even if it does not represent a specific thing or object, it still alludes to an object in general. Works of the Starns' such as *Red and Black Square* (figure 49) or *Black Piece* (figure 50), which differ from many others only through their lack of an identifiable motif, but otherwise show their usual repertory of post-photographic manipulations, provoke the viewer to search for an object or ask for its possible context. It is a search for shape and structure that can be completed by the viewer's own imagination. It is thus possible to imagine an endless number of cases where the abstract element gives way to 'objectivity' if one puts the respective image in a specific context. *Black Piece*, for example,

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[452] Mike and Doug Starn, *Aperture* 129, 19.

[453] The idea that the photograph is an image beyond the 'pave of glass' (a faithful window into another world) is transformed by postmodern photographers when they draw attention to the 'glass' itself as that strange surface which carries a message of its own.

[454] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 81.

could be seen as an extreme close up of a cropped image which would be the reason why we are unable to see the whole object and do not know its context. It could also be a highly under-exposed print of any object which became shrouded in a uniform black erasing its identifiable shape. There are of course no limits to our imagination and this is what the Starns try to convey by using a medium, that is traditionally considered to represent reality and not fantasy.

In connection with his differentiation between *studium* and *punctum* Barthes made an interesting remark about this topic. "To the reading's *Dearth-of-Image* corresponds the Photograph's *Totality-of-Image*; not only because it is already an image in itself, but because this very special image gives itself out as complete - *integral*, we might say, playing on the word. The photographic image is full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it."[455] This addition (of something that, paradoxically, is already present in the image) is the moment when the *punctum* starts to affect the viewer, when it becomes psycho-active and we begin to transcend the depicted object. In regard to *Black Piece* we could say that, without the many manipulations of the material base of the image, it would be an almost literal representation of a photograph that Barthes would characterise as uniform (which is completely determined by the *studium*).

It is important that the viewer perceives images like *Black Group#2*, *Corona*, and *Corona Extra* (figures 51-53) as photographs, irrespective of their abstract qualities. That secures the 'umbilical cord' between photograph and photographed object and, at the same time, it might trigger a critical reflection about the representational character of photography. In this context Grundberg writes that

> (a)fter some critics called their spring 1986 Stux show 'Victorian,' they produced a body of work having no images - a flirtation with abstraction and, it almost goes without saying, clearly non-Victorian. (To the Starns, these pieces, (...), demonstrated their focus on the nature of photography and its representation.)[456]

The Victorian quality also stands for an element in the Starns' work which could be called postmodern because of its timelessness and lack of original context. This is further connected with the Renaissance of the concept of beauty, which seemed abandoned by some photographic genre, but features highly in many of the Starns' works.[457]

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[455] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 89.

[456] Grundberg, "Mike and Doug Starn." in Mike and Doug Starn, *Mike and Doug Starn*. 37.

[457] This is also one of the obvious differences between the works of the Starns and Robert Frank's photographs. In his later pictures Frank eliminated all beauty. If there is some kind of a counter-balance for the dark, painful

After all the things we have said about the photographic aesthetics in the Starns' works, it is surprising to come across such a high degree of beauty in the their images. However, it is a kind of beauty which can neither be explained through the depicted object, nor by the way it is presented. Instead it seems to be the result of a combination of the strong expressionist character of their work and the eclectic selection of the motifs, which include their abstract images, relatively straightforward and unaltered pictures and those with obvious allusions to famous Classical and Renaissance paintings. Most of their works consist of self-portraits (figure 54) and portraits of friends, images of flowers and the sea, as well as photographs of famous paintings by artists like Rembrandt and Leonardo. The arbitrary and random mixture of different styles and techniques prevents the beauty and expressiveness of their works from being reactionary. It seems of no importance whether the motif is a photograph of the *Mona Lisa*, or Picasso's *Two Seated Woman*, Rembrandt's portrait of his father, a view at the wooden floor of the Louvre (figure 55), four steps of a stairway (figure 56), a chair or the blossom of a rose (figure 57). Each of these different objects is treated with the same care (-lessness) and arbitrariness.

Apart from the characteristics we have already mentioned, their images are further related to painting because of their unusually large formats and the custom made frames. In the concept of modernist photography the individual image is always limited to standard sizes of mass-produced photo-paper. In order to avoid this limitation it is necessary to either manually produce larger light-sensitive paper (or other light-sensitive material) or, as the Starns do, to paste together a number of smaller sheets. The different sizes and shapes of the papers and the way the Starns cut them creates a cubist-like pattern that becomes an integral part of the whole image. Usually their installations have a size of one to six square metres. The tape they use to hold the single sheets together is not stuck to their backside but clearly visible on the front. Instead of protecting the images from any further 'damage' with, for example, a glass plate, they are left in their raw and unfinished state. Many of the frames are made out of untreated, rough building material and are incomplete (e.g. lacking one side). Often the images are attached to a piece of second grade plywood with pins, nails or screws.

Mike and Doug Starn are very aware of the fact that the most important element in photography is neither its technical side nor the aesthetical elements, such as composition and motif but the artist's and the viewer's subjective input. To call the Starns' work deconstructive means that they must always consider the context of their own photographs as well as that of the images or genre which they try to deconstruct. Otherwise one could charge them of being

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and uncanny atmosphere of his images it might be found in the accompanying texts. Interestingly in the works of

naive followers' of the postmodern slogans 'anything goes', 'free play of signifiers' and 'ambiguity of sense'. These concepts cannot be used to legitimise the photographer's caprice, but instead might heighten our awareness of the fact that the significant elements in photographs (like in texts) are marked by contradictories and ambiguity. The Starns' use of photography is not a blind rage rush but a spontaneous, yet highly reflective and calculated attempt to expand its expressive means. One has to understand their appeal for an anarchistic treatment of the conventions and rules of modernist photography as a temporary suspension with the purpose of finding out whether this has an effect on meaning and sense of the photographs.

Another characteristic of the Starns' images is a good example of the 'classic' postmodern topos of the 'death of the author'. Their co-operation includes all work-steps, from exposing the film to printing, toning, assembling and presenting the images. Therefore the final pictures are the outcome of more than one creative source which makes the concept of individual authorship meaningless. The same attitude is visible in the unapologetic appropriation of famous pictures from the history of art. Whether it is a photograph of an original masterworks from Leonardo, Rembrandt, Copley or Picasso, or an indirect reference to classics from the history of photography like Karl Blossfeldt's 'Urformen der Kunst' (1928) or Alfred Stieglitz' portrait-studies of Georgia O'Keeffe (1918/19), in each case the Starns approach their subject with surprising casualness.[458] Considering the fact that photographs are always elements of a more or less specific cultural context, they are like a tissue where many different photographic discourses blend and clash. Parameters such as originality and creativity can rather be found in the design of the links to existing traditions, contexts and conventions.[459] One could say that the new quality in postmodern photo-aesthetics is the openness of its appropriation and use of other (earlier) styles and genre. Compared with other postmodern photographers whose copies of classical photographic master-pieces show either no or only minor alterations, the Starns' subjective input is always clearly visible, even in their 'historical' works.[460]

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the Starns text plays no role apart from the short titles of the images.

[458] See Grundberg, "Mike and Doug Starn." Mike and Doug Starn, *Mike and Doug Starn*, 41-2.

[459] Barthes describes a similar process when he talks about the 'spinning forth' of a literary text:

> We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (...) (T)he writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them." (Barthes, "From Work to Text. *Image, Music, Text.* 146.)

[460] One of the most consequent examples of copies of photographs from the canon of classical 'master-photographers' are Sherry Levine's works, which consist of straightforward photographs of photographs. The main purpose of these images is to evoke questions about 'authority', 'authenticity' and 'originality' in photography. Levine, together with Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger and Chuck Samuels, is one of the best known contemporary photographers who seeks the confrontation with older photographic schools.

The important point is that their co-operation as well as their appropriation of historical motifs and styles transcend the modernist concepts 'the author', 'authenticity' and 'originality'. In both cases the source of the subjective and expressive qualities of the images is of no importance because they are the product of a shared process. Therefore the Starns' references to historical paintings can be understood as an awareness of the fact that it is impossible to situate one's work outside a specific cultural context. It is the element of postmodern thinking which Kevin Murray labels as 'always already ... '[461], that legitimises their chaotic compendium of different motifs and styles. Abigail Solomon-Gadeau's characterisation of the differences between modernist and postmodernist photography might further clarify this point.

> For the art photographer, the issues and intentions remained those traditionally associated with the aestheticizing use and forms of the medium: the primacy of formal organization and values, the autonomy of the photographic image, the subjectivisation of vision, the fetishizing of print quality, and the unquestioned assumption of photographic authorship. (...) Thus, if one of the major claims of modernist art theory was the insistence on the autonomy and purity of the work of art, postmodern practice hinges on the assertion of contingency and the primacy of cultural codes. It follows that a significant proportion of postmodern art based on photographic usages is animated by a critical, or, if one prefers, a deconstructive impulse."[462]

The Starns' references to classical paintings have yet another transcendental quality which is visible in their appropriation of older, pictorialist photographic styles. Despite its critical and subversive potential, modernist photography has always created aesthetic principles, rules and norms which lead to movements such as Neues Sehen (Bauhaus), Neue Sachlichkeit, Experimentelle Photographie, 'Subjective Photography' etc. These schools all had in common the attempt to distance themselves from the photographic styles of the nineteenth century.

An example of questioning gender roles in modernist photography is Chuck Samuels' series *Before the Camera* (1990), which comprises twelve meticulous imitations of classical erotic master-pieces which differ from the originals only in one point, viz. that Samuels poses in front of the camera instead of a female model. The series is especially attractive for those who know the originals because for a moment the viewer is struck by the perfection of the imitation in a way that stops him or her from recognising the 'false' element.
In contrast, Joel-Peter Witkin's 'theatrical scenes' and his references to, and use of motifs from the Renaissance and early Classical Age have a different meaning. His images, overloaded with ancient visual symbols, create a strong feeling for the power of photography's inherent realism. The strong effect of his images is caused by the fact that Witkin uses real models in a visual context that, in painting, is a product of the artist's imagination. His gruesome, violent and freakish images heighten the viewer's awareness of the fact, that the photographer *must have been there* when the picture was taken and that he or she was directly confronted by death and decay. Interestingly, Witkin's main motive for taking these kinds of images is not to shock his audience but to show the beauty and sublimity in death and the freakish.

[461] Kevin Murray, "King Solomon's Net." *Photography Post Photography*. Edited by Centre for Contemporary Photography. 119.

Interstingly the Starns' works show a number of elements which express a renewed convergence with the pictorialist photography of the late nineteenth century. Thus the novelty in postmodern photography is its unconcealed and unapologetic appropriation of the old. The goal though is not to revive or restore, but to emphasise the fact that the terms 'old' and 'new' are context-related categories. The Starns' photographs' are especially interesting and exciting to look at because of their content, their beauty, the way they are framed and presented in combination with the extreme anti-perfectionism and the equal treatment of the motifs (abstract, representational). The saying that the real purpose of a work of art is the creative process of which it is the end-result also holds true for the Starns' images. Mike and Doug: "The cracks aren't there for an antiqued look (...) Unlike a Mark Rothko that has changed with age and is not the painting it originally was, our work is conceived to change and age. Its aging is not its death but its life and creation."[463] This is an attitude which goes against the classical and modernist concept of duration and preservation of a work of art. Its fleeting and unfinished character could rather be seen as an example of performance art.

7.9 Duane Michals

Compared with Frank's later works and the Starns' large assembled pieces, Duane Michals' images have a rather tame look. In most cases Michals does not alter the negatives and prints through any direct mechanical or chemical manipulations. Abstractness plays only a minor role in his aesthetics because it is important for the stories and narratives of Michals' photo-sequences that the viewer is able to identify the theatrical gestures and facial expressions of the depicted models, as well as the spaces where they interact. Although some of Michals' images too show traces of photographic techniques (tricks) which do not adhere to the faithful depiction of reality, they are applied to an otherwise 'neutral' image which is not even enhanced by artificial lighting. In fact the opposite is the case because Michals is a master of directing his models and placing the objects in a way so that the available natural light appears artificial. It illuminates the things which are important for the understanding of the story but leaves all other parts of the scene in a mysterious darkness. At other times he immerses the meaningful details in darkness in order to force the viewer's fantasy to add what remains invisible. The serial moment plays a major role in Michals' works too because most of the time each individual photograph is part of a sequence. Although compared with the work of

[462] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Postmodernisms." *Illuminations*. Edited by Heron and Williams. 315.
[463] Mike and Doug Starn, *Mike and Doug Starn*, 38.

Frank and the Starns, the order of the images in Michals' series is of greater importance. The ambiguity of his images is not the result of random links between the individual photographs but of the lack of coherence between the photographic series and the accompanying text. This is another key concept in Michals' images which is important for the understanding of his apparently inconspicuous and naive photographic sequences.

The textual element in Michals' works is of greater significance than in the ones of any of the previously discussed photographers. In some cases it totally replaces the visual parts as in *Shopping With Mother*, *I Am Much Nicer Than God* or *A Failed Attempt To Photograph Reality* (figures 58-60). They comprise only text and no images and they deal with abstract concepts such as 'god' and 'reality', which are beyond what photography is able to represent in a literal way.[464] And yet the 'border-zone' between realistic photograph and abstract or fantasy-like text is the sphere where Michals' dramas, tragedies, burlesques, dreams, philosophical inquiries and sexual desires are being acted out.

In regard to his aesthetics one could formulate that photography's inability to depict something which is not a visual appearance makes it especially useful to refer to the transcendental themes which are the main subject of his works. The artistically interesting tension in his photo-sequences is the outcome of the contrast between the medium photography and the medium language which is prone to distort and alter reality. Another element of his works is the attempt to overcome the natural limitations of photography with the help of a few simple technical manipulations, such as double exposures, creating a limited depth of field in order to keep specific objects out of focus and to under- or overexpose certain parts of the print. The fascinating quality of Michals' minimalist aesthetical tools is the fact that, together with the accompanying text, they reach out to the transcendental sphere beyond the realistic depiction of identifiable objects. Furthermore, they comprise an inherent critique of the traditional understanding of the relationship between image and text.

Despite the unreliability of an artist's statements about his or her motives and intentions, I would like to quote from an interview that Michals gave in 1984 to the art-historian Marco Linvingstone. It might give us a general idea how to approach his photographs.

> There's no other art form which reproduces reality with that kind of fidelity. But to me that is to say that appearances are the only things which we consider to be real. What about dreams, what about fear, what about lust, what about all

[464] In other cases the abstract quality of the subject that Michals is dealing with does not stop him from using photographs.

those intimidations which we perform on each other? These experiences, to me, constitute reality.[465]

I believe it is easy to understand why photography's ability to depict things and objects in a realistic manner must fail when confronted with the themes that Michals mentions. In order to represent abstract subjects such as time, death, desire, morals, the self etc. language is needed, although it remains questionable where to draw the line between 'pure form' and the 'beyond' which requires a linguistic explanation to be identifiable. Since Michals plays with that ambiguity and arbitrariness with great virtuosity, his images send the viewer into confusion and bafflement. They always show a remarkable discrepancy between the simple, 'pathetic' and staged photographs and the text-addition which functions as one possible narration for the respective image. Yet there always remains a gap between image and text which can be reconciled only through our fantasy.

Michals, who worked not only as an art-photographer but was also successful with his commercial advertising and fashion photography, used this specific dynamics for an advertising campaign for the clothing company GAP (figure 61). On the right side of the poster we see Michals' himself, clothed in jeans trousers and jeans jacket (probably from the GAP collection) making a gesture with his hands that indicates the specific size of a spatial gap. In the lower right corner of the image the company logo (GAP) is clearly visible. A small bird is sitting on Michals' right hand index finger looking in his direction. On the left side of the poster we read the following sentences, printed on a black background: "Narrative. It's how you forge a context by linking what seems unrelated. Classic Gap, for individuals who reach conclusions all their own."[466] Irrespective whether we appreciate the play on words, the important clue about the meaning of the relationship between image and text in Michals' works is present in that first sentence: "Narrative. It's how you forge a context by linking what seems unrelated."

It seems helpful to put this statement in context with Derrida's lecture on Marie-Françoise Plissart's photographs because it is a good example of such a narrative. Derrida presents his fictitious dialogue in a fashion that leaves the reader in a state of uncertainty about the real positions of the dialogue partners in regard to the models in the pictures. The main reason for this ambiguity lies in the meaning of the personal pronouns that are used in the dialogue. Even though they refer to something singular ('I', 'you', 'her', 'he'), the immediate presence of these individualities vanishes as soon as one attempts to give it a name or label it. Something very similar happens in Michals' photo-text-sequences. In this sense an 'I' can only be itself for as

[465] Duane Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 7.

long as it does not say or think 'I', and the same is true for the temporal preposition 'now' and the spatial preposition 'here'. Now (presence) is only for as long as it is not denoted. The moment language starts to point towards the 'now' its immediateness vanishes and it becomes a 'then'. Michals writes in *Time is such a Funny Thing* (figure 62)

> Time is such a funny thing,
> It's like the hole inside a ring,
> Its always now and never then,
> But when I say it's now again
> It's never now but always then.
> We're always here but never there,
> But when I go from here to there,
> Then there is here and here is there.
> (...)
> To me I'm 'I' and never you.
> You say you're 'I' and also me,
> I know that's true, How can that be
> Since I'm not you, and you're not me
> Time is not what you might think
> It is and isn't in a wink.[467]

More than any of the previously discussed photographers' work, Michals' images are concerned with psychological and psychoanalytical themes. His images contain many allusions to oedipal conflicts, unfulfilled homo- and heterosexual desire and the uncontrollable influx of unconscious impulses into our rational mind. Seeing and being seen as the two poles of scopophilia are important elements in Michals' images. Firstly as enjoyment of watching the mostly young and beautiful male bodies which inhabit his

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[466] Duane Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 184.

[467] Duane Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 100.
Michals has created another work that is concerned with the impossible existence of the present moment. It has the title *Now Becoming Then.* It emphasises the 'human factor' of time in the sense that it is impossible to understand time as an external reality which exists outside and independent of a human consciousness. Instead time is always the product of the successive linking of past and future moments within our mind. The image that accompanies the text is made up of two photographs which are prints of the same negative, showing a male person who strides through a large, empty room. Of one of the photos Michals made a reversed print which he then attached to the equivalent side of the original image. A small gap at that seam creates a narrow black border between them. The whole image gives us the impression that the two men are striding in opposite directions. At the seam though the fingers of one of their hands seem to slightly touch each other. Considering text and image we might come to the following interpretation: The seam, that very thin black line together with the subtle contact of the fingers symbolises the fleeting and transitory existence of presence.
See Duane Michals, "Now Becoming Then." *The Essential Duane Michals*, 91.

photographs, and secondly in the way of his own regular appearances in his images.[468] Works like *How Nice to Watch you Take a Bath* (figure 63) and *He Was Unaware That at That Exact Moment ..* (figure 64) are good examples of the erotic tension in his photographs that comes about through looking at the desired objects. This condition can also help us understand the importance of natural light in his photographs because light is not only that element or medium which makes the objects of the world photograph-able, it can also function as a compensation for the photographer's inability to have direct tactile contact with a person or an object. Our language is full of idiomatic expressions which are testimony to this fact, e.g. 'to undress somebody with one's eyes', 'to devour somebody with one's eyes', 'to seduce somebody with looks', 'to exchange tender glances with somebody' etc. The important moment in all these 'compensatory acts' lies in the peculiarity of the visual sense to create a quasi-tactile nearness whilst keeping a spatial distance. In regard to Michals' photographs this would mean that the soft and rich grades of grey-scales of his images might be an expression of his desire, affection and care for the young men who model in his photo-sequences.[469]

The fictitious, polyphonic and dialogical character of Michals' photo-texts could also be understood in terms of Lacan's dictum 'I is another', Barthes' 'divided personality' and Derrida's 'dialogue without names', all of which question the unity of the self. *Who Am I?* (figure 65) is probably the most literal expression of this 'conditio humana' in Michals' work. The image that accompanies the text shows a beautiful, young and muscular man in half-profile who looks into a distorting mirror which leaves his face grotesquely deformed.[470] In a photo-sequence in which the element of 'being-a-stranger-to-oneself' is linked with another frequently recurring theme (death), it becomes even more obvious that the actions of his protagonists are always affected by ambiguous discourse positions. His texts often begin with a voice saying 'I', or as a narrator's voice from outside the image who is telling us something about the depicted models, yet in the course of the narrative, the personal pronouns often swap their positions. *The Man In The Room* (66) is a fascinating example for this kind of instability. The text reads as follows.

> When I first saw him sitting there, I was startled. Three days ago I had attended his funeral. My first impulse was to tell him that I loved him, something I had never done while he was alive. It remained an impulse. He seemed to be aware of my presence; and when he turned he was surprised to see me. He said

[468] See Kozloff in Duane Michals, *Now Becoming Then.*
[469] See Livingstone, in Duane Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 148.
[470] In 1973 Michals had already given an answer to the question "Who Am I" viz. with the work titled *I Am Another.*

everyone there missed me. Helen was very sad. When he said 'Helen', I was filled with great affection, but I couldn't remember who Helen was. It was than that I looked into the mirror and could not see my reflection. I now understood that I was dead, and the man in the room was the one alive. When I turned to look at the man again he appeared to become soft. Everything was become soft. I could not recognize him anymore. Dying is not at all what I thought it would be."[471]

The accompanying photo-sequence that comprises seven images has a strong aesthetic appeal despite its photographic simplicity. The images show Michals' typical characteristics which are natural (day-) light, streaming through the large windows into the empty room, a cool and neo-modernist order of the depicted objects, the unmasked poses of the models and in the last two pictures a progressive blurring of the whole scene, which directly corresponds with the sentences: "When I turned to look at the man again, he appeared to become soft. Everything was become soft."[472] If one either looks at the photographs or just reads the text, it is obvious that the dramatic suspension of the story (which is resolved only in the very last sentence) is the result of the combination of the two different media. Despite their theatrical character the photographs are too unspecific in order to evoke the intended meaning.

Considering Barthes' concept of 'the photograph which is completely image', one could also say that the photographic record is too specific and concrete to represent such abstract themes like one's own death. It is of course possible to photograph dead people but the intellectual and emotional reflection about the death of friends, loved ones or ourselves goes beyond the representational moment of photography. Even in a relatively readable work like *Self Portrait As If I Were Dead* (figure 67), the text is a necessary component in order to make sense of the double exposed image.[473]

The text of *The Man In The Room* by itself lacks a certain seriousness to be more than a mere fantasy or dream, yet in combination with the relatively realistic photo-sequence the text takes on the necessary depth to cause such strong bafflement through the last sentence: "Dying is not at all what I thought it would be." The main reason for the surprising twist of the narrative is an effect of the sudden revelation, that the dead one is in fact the narrator-I and not the photographed person. Although, there are other inconsistencies that are also cause for the ambiguity of the story. For example, one could ask whether it would be more coherent if the sight of the 'man in the room' would vanish and become blurred instead of the narrator's, since

[471] Michals, "The Man In The Room." *Now Becoming Then*, n.p.
[472] Michals, "The Man In The Room." *Now Becoming Then*, n.p.
[473] See Michals "As If I Were Dead" *The Essential Duane Michals*, 118-9.

it was that man who communicated with someone (the narrator) whose funeral had been held three days ago. This version could also be bolstered by the fact that the narrator-I has no mirror image. Furthermore one could speculate about the meaning of the fact that Michals puts us into the visual position of the narrator-I (narrator's eye) instead of the perspective of the 'man in the room' or a 'neutral' position from where we would be able to see both protagonists. One possible explanation is that this heightens the surprising effect at the end of the story. Another reason might be that such a theme cannot be dealt with other than in a subjective manner or view, which is what Michals seems to tell us with his existentialist speculations.

If we ignore, for a moment, the specific themes in Michals' photo-texts, one could say that almost all of his works are dealing with the 'non-linear' or incongruent relation between text and photograph. The sequential and textual elements are one of the premises with which he shows us that an objective photographic representation of reality is a mere ideal. His work *There Are Things Here Not Seen In This Photograph* (68) is a genuine expression of the fact that even the straightest and most realistic photographic record of a visual impression can only represent some elements of the 'richness of existence'. The photograph is part of the series *Empty New York*, and is accompanied by a text which adds that kind of hustle and bustle to the sad, empty and run down bar, that is absent in the image. The significance of this photo lies in the fact, that it shows us the artificiality of the division between an external and objective reality and a social, linguistic and psychological reality. In order to call the depicted place and the objects an empty and tedious bar, it is not only necessary to identify the things we expect to find in such a place like bar-stools, juke-box, cigarette machine, mirrors behind the bar, etc., it is also important to refer to the things which are not there but which are still a necessary part of the whole concept of a bar. Therefore the viewer has to imagine things such as a crowd of people, background noise which consists of people talking, music, laughter, clinging of glass etc., drunks, pool-players, a TV showing some sports game etc. The text that Michals added to the image is not a proper description of the things and objects that are missing in the image, but an example of one of the many possible scenes that happen in such establishments. It is a subjective allusion to all that which is part of the 'being-a-bar' but exceeds the concrete information of the photograph.[474]

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[474] See Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 58.
We can assume that the text is written from the perspective of one of the absent guests.

> My shirt was wet with perspiration. The beer tasted good but I was still thirsty. Some drunk was talking loudly to another drunk about Nixon. I watched a roach walk slowly along the edge of a bar stool. On the juke box Glen Campbell began to sing about 'Southern Nights'. I

The concept of the absence of something which is present is closely related to Lacan's term of the real. In his view the peculiarity of the real is the fact that it can neither be symbolised nor imagined and therefore never be experienced as such. Therefore the 'real-in-itself' is comprehensible only in negative terms. The psychoanalyst Peter Widmer explains: "He [Lacan] says about the real that it is the impossible; and also that which is always in the same place (...) finally something resisting against which one bangs his head. (...) It is that which is neither symbolic nor imaginary."[475] Hence we have to understand the real as something "which evades language, as that, one unsuccessfully tries to grasp with the instrument of logic, as that which is impossible to comprehend,"[476] because it is a priori to all signifying processes. If we apply this concept to the symbolic structure of our sensory receptivity, it should be obvious that something is always excluded from it because this 'something' is prior to the differentiation between perception and that which is perceived. Keeping this in mind will help us to understand Michals' work *A Failed Attempt To Photograph Reality* which comprises no images but only the following text.

> How foolish of me to believe that it would be that easy. I had confused the appearances of trees and automobiles, and people with reality itself, and believed that a photograph of these appearances to be a photograph of it. It is a melancholy truth that I will never be able to photograph it and can only fail. I am a reflection photographing other reflections within a reflection. To photograph reality is to photograph nothing.[477]

If we do not give up searching for the origin of this dynamics of reflected reflections, sooner or later we will come to a point where we learn that the first signifier in the visual field is that which Lacan and Barthes called 'the gaze', and which Frank attempted to visualise in the above mentioned work *Mabou Winter Footage*. Michals' work *A Story About A Story* (figure 69) which consists of one image and accompanying text, is yet another variation on this theme. The image shows a young and handsome man in a pose which is an obvious expression of 'thoughtfulness'. Another significant characteristic of this image is that the young man is positioned between two large mirrors which reflect each other's reflections. The image was taken in a way that it does not show the whole scene but only one of the mirrors in which we see the reflections of the opposite mirror being infinitely reflected (mise en abyme). The text goes as follows:

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had to go the men's room. A derelict began to walk towards me to ask for money. It was time to leave." (Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 58-9)

[475] Widmer, *Subversion des Begehrens*, 57. [my translation]

[476] Widmer, *Subversion des Begehrens*, 57-8. [my translation]

[477] Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 211.

> This is a story about a man telling a story about a man telling a story. (...) He finds a box and when he opens it, he finds another box inside and inside that box is an even smaller one and yet an even smaller one inside it. When at last he finds the tiniest box of all, he takes a magnifying glass to see what he can see. But all he sees is a giant eye looking back at him.[478]

Apart from exploring the concept of the subject of the gaze, the last two works are also a visual expression of the linguistic concept of the play of signifiers. It is impossible for the photographer to leave the 'web of reflections' in the same way as one can not step outside the web of linguistic signifiers. When Michals writes "I am a reflection ... " he also seems to refer to the fact that his position behind the camera is at the same time part of the tableau of visibility.

Michals' photo-text narratives must also be put in context with René Magritte's work, because he visited Magritte in 1965 in Belgium and photographed him in his work and home environment. These pictures were published in a small photo book with the title *A Visit with Magritte*. The images comprise Michals' usual repertory of aesthetical and textual elements: simple, cool-modernist compositions, soft and natural lighting which streams through large windows, double exposures, mirror images and short sentences. Some of the images show significant similarities with Magritte's paintings. For example *Magritte At His Easel* (figure 70) seems to be closely related to Magrittes' *The Human Condition I. Magritte At His Easel* is not a straightforward portrait but a triple exposure which gives the viewer the impression that Magritte, the easel and a chair are lying on top of one another. (Magritte appears a second time as a reflection in a mirror in the upper left field of the image). Instead of being a realistic image which coheres with the title, it is a fictitious scene that shows us that even the combination of text and photograph do not necessarily produce an unambiguous message. One can imagine a number of possible circumstances for which the sentence or title *Magritte At His Easel*, together with that specific image, could both be true and false.[479]

Michals has produced another photograph which, although not part of the 'Magritte-cycle', refers directly to Magritte's painting *The Treachery of Images*. The work has got the title *Ceci n'est pas une photo d'une pipe* and shows a street-scene in what seems to be a major city. The background consists of a very large building, in front of it a street, cars, people and in the frontmost plain of the image a young woman who turns her head half-way towards us looking

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[478] Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 16.

[479] For example, if we do not associate it with the moment when the image of the easel was taken (i.e. when Magritte did not stand or sit there), but to the visual impression evoked by the triple exposure, one could certainly say that it is a true description of that scene.

directly into the camera. Michals coloured the whole image in a slight opaque brown-red-yellow which gives it an overall abstract quality. The most prominent element though is a pipe painted across the image, that takes up about three quarters of the whole space. Underneath the image one reads the hand-written sentence: "Ceci n'est pas une photo d'une pipe". Compared with Magrittes' original, Michals' work is aesthetically less effective because it lacks some of the contradictory elements and subtleties of *The Treachery of Images*. Image and text of *The Treachery of Images* evoke bafflement because, on first sight, they seem to create a paradoxical message, whereas the text in Michals' image describes an obviously true fact or condition. The depicted pipe is not a photograph of a pipe but the painting of a pipe. Since the text is a realistic explanation of the image, the conventional relationship between image and text remains intact. Instead of the allusion to Magritte's painting, it makes more sense to consider the meaning of the fact that Michals damaged the print by painting on it.

At the end of the seventies Michals started to paint directly on photographs, irrespective whether they were his own images or an expensive original print of famous photographers such as Ansel Adams, André Kertesz or Henry Cartier-Bresson.[480] Like Sherry Levine, Michals does not hesitate to put his own signature onto the manipulated photographs of his famous colleagues, knowing that this is a risky project which raises the question: How much change, addition or manipulation is necessary in order to turn the original of another photographer into an original Michals?

Michals' work titled *This Photograph Is My Proof* (figure 71) comprises a similar paradoxical moment as the one in Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*. The discrepancy between text and image in *This Photograph Is My Proof* is caused by the fact that the image does obviously not prove anything. It is just a photograph of a young man and a woman sitting on a bed in a posture that suggests the relatedness and intimacy of 'being-a-couple'. The image is accompanied by the following text: "This photograph is my proof. There was that afternoon, when things were still good between us, and she embraced me, and we were so happy. It did happen. She did love me. Look see for yourself!"[481] One has to admit that the text does indeed describe one possible meaning of that photograph but it remains impossible for a photo to unambiguously represent such abstract subjects like love, subjectivity, emotionality etc. The fact that the text insists on the testifying ability of the photograph makes it sound like a projection of the narrator to make us (and himself) believe in something, which does not exist anymore and maybe never existed at all. The photograph as such is no definite proof of the

[480] See Renaud Camus, "The Shadow Of A Double" in Michals, *Duane Michals*.
[481] Michals, *The Essential Duane Michals*, 201.

meaning of the text. It might be helpful to recall once again what Barthes says about photography's realism?

> Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature tendentious, never as to its existence. Impotent with regard to general ideas (to fiction), its force is nonetheless superior to everything the human mind can or cannot have conceived to assure us of reality - but also this reality is never anything but a contingency ('so much, no more').[482]

We can accept the narrator's short text insofar as the young man and the woman must have been there (posing in that particular way) at the time when the image was taken, but it is beyond the scope of photography to prove whether they were in love and truly happy together.[483]

[482] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 87.

[483] This particular work of Michals' is also a good example of a subject that is a major theme in advertising photography. Irrespective of the product to be promoted the image of 'the happy couple' (as parents, lovers etc.) functions as a strong source which fuels the consumer's desire to buy that product and implicitly a part of the happiness apparently represented by the couple.

Epilogue

What is the condition of the post-modern gaze, we asked at the beginning of this journey through the works of some of post-modernity's most influential theoretical advocates and visual experimenters. Perhaps the most basic answer to this question lies in Lacan's phenomenological concept of the gaze as light that fills and overflows 'the bowl of the eye'. As we have seen this is not only directly mirrored in some of the late photographs of Robert Frank (e.g. *Mabou Winter Footage*) or the Starns (*Eye With Film and Plywood*, figure 72), but seems at work to a certain degree in almost all the discussed theories and images. The one-directionality that used to characterise the God's eye view and then the view of the enlightened modern humanist is shown to always have been fragmented like a shattered mirror.

What the discussion of the various authors revealed is that visuality is not a universal anthropological given, but a variable of the specific conditions of a society. The main goal of this study then was to understand this variable in terms of a close link between language, representation, and the structure of the sense of seeing and its externalisation in the photo camera. It is obvious that this is a dialectical relationship where language shapes the way we view 'the world' and where the perceived images in turn influence linguistic concepts of truth and reality. Consequently, if one of these parameters changes, its Other will automatically be affected as well.

I believe that despite the general anti-ocularcentric tone of this thesis, the reader can sense the fascination with, and passion for, the endless spectacles of the visible world among the authors and photographers presented. Anti-ocularcentric in this context does not necessarily mean anti-visual, which seems self-evident in the case of the photographers. It is more to do with the displacement of the visual habit from the centre stage of the symbolic order, which is also a configuration of power. Yet, it is also easy to recognise the appreciation of the sense of seeing among certain writers and theorists, as long as it is understood to be multi-facetted and bi-directional.[484] "Ocular-*ec*centricity rather than blindness, it might be argued, is the antidote

[484] Finally, Foucault's critique of the 'gaze of surveillance' is an attempt to return the one-directional gaze of the power of the state back on itself. In Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) we find an impressive metaphor of the state exerting power over the individual by controlling the gaze. It does this by prohibiting the return gaze, i.e. prohibiting the look back at the watch-tower (in a metaphorical sense). At the culmination of the movie the protagonist Alex, a young, brutal deviant and convicted murderer is undergoing the so called 'Ludovico Treatment', where he is forced to watch endless films that contain the most horrific atrocities. He is tied to a chair and his eyes are clamped open which makes it impossible for him not to see what happens in front of him on the screen. After two weeks of looking at this over-dimensional and hyper-real 'mirror image', Alex turns into a vulnerable and helpless individual who is robbed of all 'natural' aggression.

to privileging any one visual order or scopic regime."[485] Ocular-eccentricity, though, is merely another term for what we have called the decentering of the gaze. They both mean a kind of peripheral seeing that takes into account the importance of the many individual elements that a 'whole' visual impression consists of. Ocular-eccentricity is a valuable starting point for the instigation of a change of a specific scopic regime. An example for this kind of manoeuvring are the photographs of Chuck Samuels which are almost identical copies of famous nude studies from the history of photography (e.g. *After Man Ray*).[486] In a minute effort Samuels imitates all the details from the originals except for one: he replaced the female models with himself. The photographs are especially interesting for those who are acquainted with the originals because at first glance it is easy to overlook this mimicking of the stereo-typical female poses. One is so used to associate the displayed poses with a female model that it takes a while before the eye adjusts to the alteration. When Samuels gazes back at the camera the viewer is left with a strange feeling that there is something 'wrong' because that passive and seductive gaze does not match the male body. In contrast to Sherman's doll-composition 'Untitled #250, 1992' where the facial features of the mask are grotesquely male, Samuels' face as well as his body have a strong androgynous appeal.

Another paradigmatic position on how to relate the theoretical approaches and the photographic images is present in Derrida's lecture on Marie-François Plissart's photographs. What is supposed to be a 'lecture' is carried out as an indecisive dialogue which, in the end, leaves it open whether what has been said relates to something real or something imagined, dreamt and desired. Of course, I do not suggest that 'Derrida & Co' are advocates of a meaningless and tired 'anything goes' form of analysis, but they are also not able to provide us with the degree of theoretical certainty one might wish for. Yet, rather than considering this to represent a lack of rigour, it can instead be seen as a direct reflection of the inflation of fragmentary viewpoints and positions of the gaze in the visual sphere under post-modern conditions. Analytic, logocentric viewpoints may offer more precision in deciphering the visual field, but Derrida has shown that this precision is essentially imaginary. On the contrary, he suggests that we have to be prepared to abandon our desire to completely explain a photographic image. This can even mean letting go of a theorist's writings, lest the explanation itself cover over precisely what we are attempting to see. Who could in fact assume that a Lacanian inspired psycho-active reading of a specific image has a true or final meaning? Would one not have to undertake the impossible task and directly ask the

[485] Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth–Century French Thought*. 591.
[486] See Hans-Michael Herzog (ed.): The body / Le Corps, 36-43.

photograph, the photographer, the depicted object and one's own unconscious for further information? Real life will never wait for us to get all this housework done.

The same seems to hold true for Derrida's polyloguous series of images which, hypothetically, is the source for an infinite number of photographic narratives. These narratives are not only an outcome of the different possibilities for placing images into a specific order, but furthermore, of their endless inter-connection to contexts outside the actual series. At which point, one might ask: Is it plausible to put an end to the 'play of reflections' between the images, or what would be a sufficient reason to favour one particular string of images over another one? In my view, Derrida's remarks are clearly indicating the existence of a subject-independent gaze that is (to use his own term) disseminated through the exchange of looks between the photo-graphing/graphed models. Here too the gaze is bi-directional and multi-facetted, always bearing a great potential of strategic power. This is why for him the concept of 'the dame' in Plissart's images is of such importance. Like the dame in the draughts-game, these gazes can cross the visual field in all directions at an unrestricted rate.

As we have seen, the close connection between power and the gaze is of even greater concern in the work of Foucault. 'The right to see' is one important way in which power manifests itself, and it is obvious that the more focussed this gaze is, the deeper it penetrates the sphere of the individual(s) it sets out to supervise. Yet again, it seems reductive to interpret or describe a photographic image purely in terms of it being the outcome of conflicting power-interests. Concepts such as time, beauty, death, love, the soul etc. also make up the subjects of photographs, and they are equally important as lines of power that run through, and structure, every photographic practise. The lyricism in many of Duane Michals' and Robert Frank's images is an example of the relative absence of the necessity to directly address matters of power and hierarchical structures. Although, here too it is difficult to exactly determine where the lyrical ends and the political begins. Take Michals' homoerotic images of young and beautiful men. Besides their specific meaning in context with the related textual elements, each of them seems to contain a statement about the matter of homosexuality and discrimination in a more or less homophobic society.

In the case of feminist imagery the underlying political agenda is, of course, much more obvious and pressing. As chapter four has shown us, a lot of feminist theory is employing the critical potential of Lacanian, Foucauldian and Derrida's thinking, applying it to issues that are marked by uneven power-dynamics between patriarchy and other configurations. This uneven distribution of power is played out at both the macro and the micro level in debates concerning pornography and women's liberation. The lack of an essential 'écriture feminine'

made it necessary to 'borrow' critical tools, even from fields which are inherently sexist themselves (e.g. Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis). Post-feminist thinkers have been able to extract the gems that remain in the mine of subversive (yet patriarchal) frameworks offered by Lacan and Freud. The variety of feminist strands, and their different goals and approaches is only one reason why a category such as 'feminist photography' is likely to be too broad and overtly general to include in a single category the difficulties in finding a notion of womanhood that would be able to account for the specific needs of all women, regardless of parameters like race, class, education, age etc. Feminist photography can cover only certain parts of what would be a 'full' concept of 'being a woman'. True to every attempt at establishing the defining features of any political genre, feminism searched for unity and found difference. Therefore, feminist photography often blends into something one might generally call a humanistic and enlightened artistry, which is less at risk of becoming exclusive and discriminatory itself. Yet another way of dealing with the limited validity of certain feminist claims is to make that awareness part of the respective (art-) work, which invites, on a basic level, the clear identification of the particular group of women one intends to speak for.

This was also the underlying theme in chapter five which showed us that one woman's desire is another woman's disgust. It would be much easier to fight the omnipresent sexism in patriarchal societies if it could clearly be identified with, for example, the phenomenon of pornography. Like many other conspiracy theories, the search for the universal evil in man ended in failure at a very practical level. In order to find the essential cause of violence against women, one would first of all need a proper and unambiguous definition of pornography and an unambiguous causal link that led to the smoking gun. Who then, is the question, is in a position to decide whether a photograph is pornography, erotic art, a political statement, a subversive parody or a combination of them?[487] Who decides whether pornography is contained in the image or in the eyes of the beholder. Who knows for sure whether pornography is the cause or the effect of violence against women (and men)? There seems to be no possible answer without taking into account the intention of the photographer, the motives and attitudes of the viewer, the (art-) historical context etc. It is obvious that there is no limit to the list of variables, which is why here too vagueness is the main result of the attempt to determine the qualities of this specific photographic genre. Accordingly, it does not make sense to simply try to banish and censor such a fragmented phenomenon.

[487] See Jeff Koons, *Wolfman*, figure 73.

One of the most useful concepts of the pornographic is Berkeley Kaite's notion of the viewer's complicity with an illicit (sexual) desire, i.e. a desire that promises to exclusively circulate between the model(s) in the image and the person looking at it. The pornographic dynamic works through a voluntary exchange of a piece of social reality for a fantasy by short-circuiting the deferential moment of desire. It is a two way process. The desire of the porn consumer will not disappear when a particular genre of images disappears from public viewing. What goes under ground can be even more difficult to manage.

The disadvantage of this abstract characterisation of pornography is that it can easily be extended to imagery that is used to instigate many other forms of desire that are not primarily sexual. Hence the use of notions such as 'beauty-pornography' or 'the pornography of representation' by some feminists. Yet, Marianne Müller's images, for example, have shown us that it is not the degree of explicit nudity alone that defines the pornographic. Since she does not allow the viewer to be the suturing element of her desire, even the depictions of her genitals or of her engaging in sexual acts can not be called pornographic in the traditional sense.[488]

In chapter six we followed Barthes' several attempts to understand the photographic gaze, which started out as a demystifying and semiological (structuralist) adventure and became finally a very personal and 'ethical' quest for an ontology of photography. "I was overcome by an 'ontological' desire: I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was 'in itself'."[489] In my view the eclectic selection of photographic images that Barthes talks about in *Camera Lucida* is highly significant. Almost all of them are portrait studies, some historical, some contemporary, and as one would expect from portraits they recorded the model's gaze as it is directly looking into the lens of the camera. This selection is an effect of Barthes' notion of photographic truth, that comprises a temporal element ('that-has-been') and an abstract element of likeness, i.e. a likeness without resemblance. A third element though is implicated in this concept of truth, which could be called 'the intensity of the gaze'; an expression which we have already used in connection with the discussion of some of Robert Frank's images. The degree of this intensity is a result of two gazes, i.e. that of the person looking into the lens and that of the photographer which is represented by the camera.[490] According to Barthes, in

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[488] Barthes too provides us with a 'definition' which does not determine the degree of nudity or any kind of specific acts. Instead, he describes the pornographic as a "pleasure that passes through the image," thereby becoming a 'tableau vivant' that eludes the reality of conflicting human desires. (See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 118.)

Aside – Baudrillard would probably say that the more we see of a woman the less we desire her ...

[489] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 3.

[490] It is obvious that the title of Barthes' until recently unpublished notes for an anthology of the gaze, titled *Auge in Auge* (Eye in Eye) is an allusion to the constellation of gazes in (portrait-) photography.

both cases the gaze is always searching for something or someone beyond what is actually visible. He also calls it "an entity, whose essence lies in its excessiveness."[491] The truth in portrait-photography is thus not an outcome of the honesty or sincerity of the way the photographed person looks into the lens because here too, the subject does not see because its gaze is merely looking into another 'mysterious eye'. Not resemblance, and not sincerity but instead the possibility - implicit in the functioning of the gaze - that a 'beyond the visible surface' exists: that is, according to Barthes, the most accurate notion of truth in photography.[492]

To some extent Barthes must be given the credit for providing us with the most elaborate exploration of the meaning of the gaze in photographic images. Although, as I have said at the beginning, on a more general level his writings too are only one piece in that complex and, of course, unresolved puzzle about the meaning of this immaterial mystery we call the gaze.

[491] Barthes, *Der Entgegenkommende und der Stumpfe Sinn*, 315. [my translation]
[492] Barthes, *Der Entgegenkommende und der Stumpfe Sinn*, 317-8.

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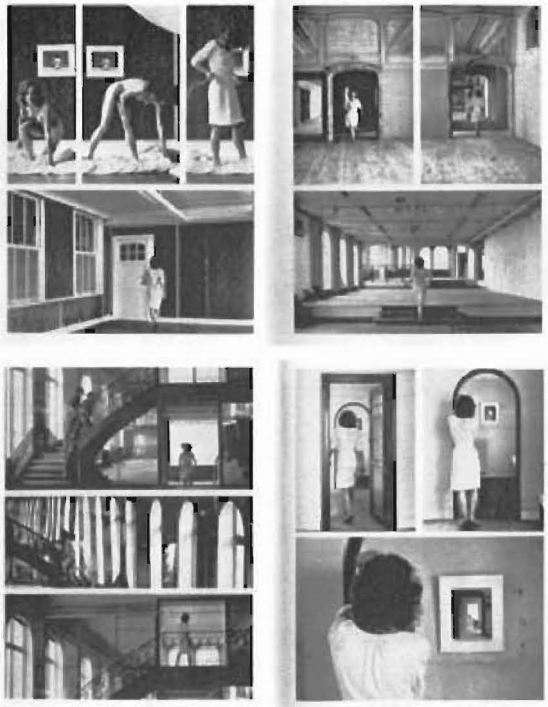

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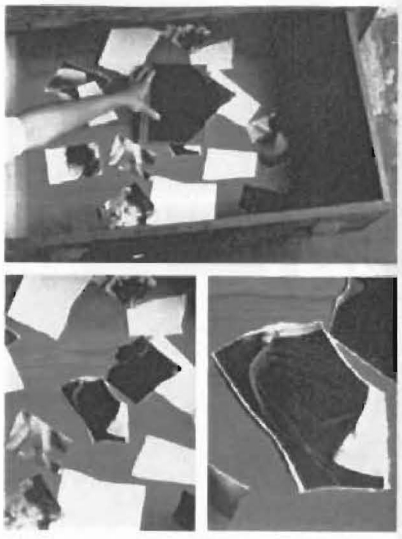

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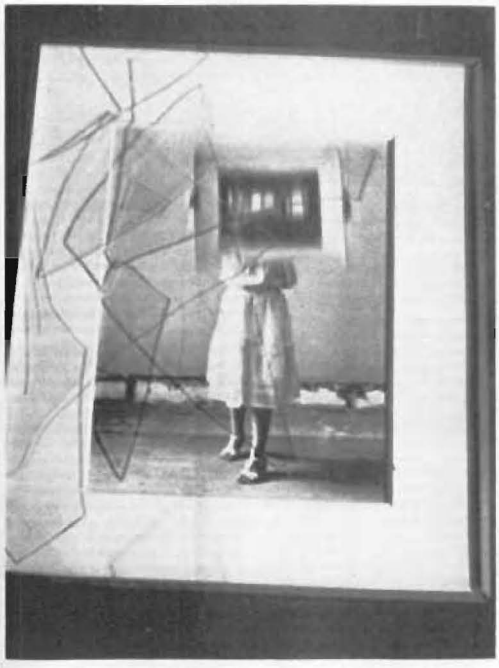


fig. 3

fig. 5

fig. 6

fig. 7

fig. 8

fig. 9

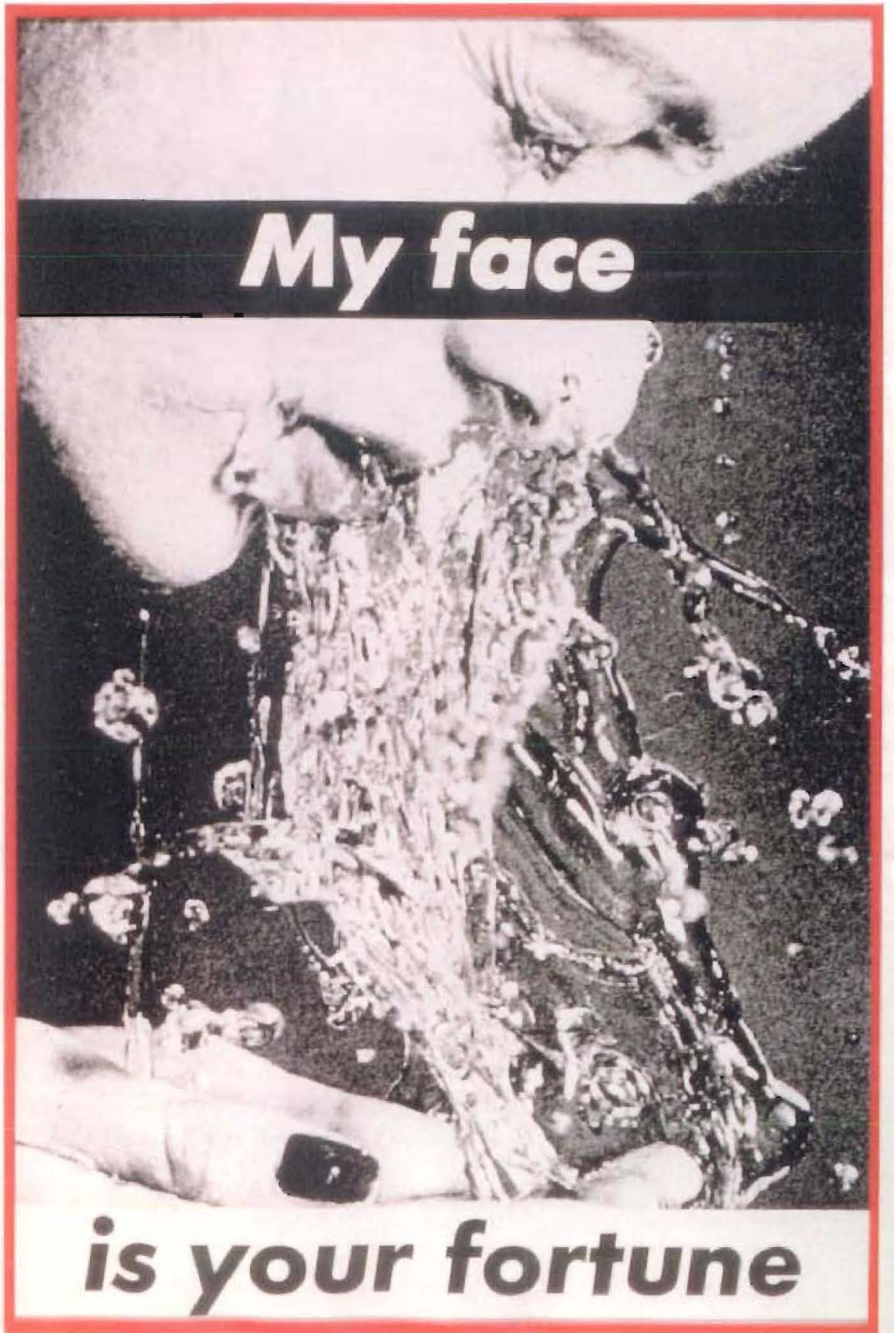
fig. 10

fig. 11

fig. 12

fig. 13

fig. 14



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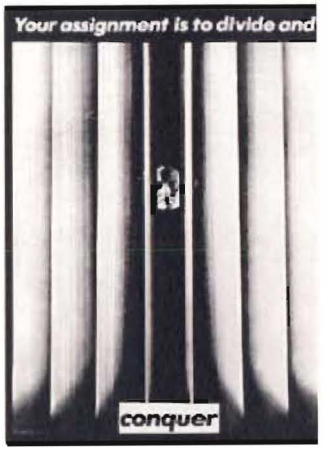


fig. 17

fig. 18

fig. 19

fig. 20

fig. 21

fig. 22

fig. 23

fig. 24

fig. 25

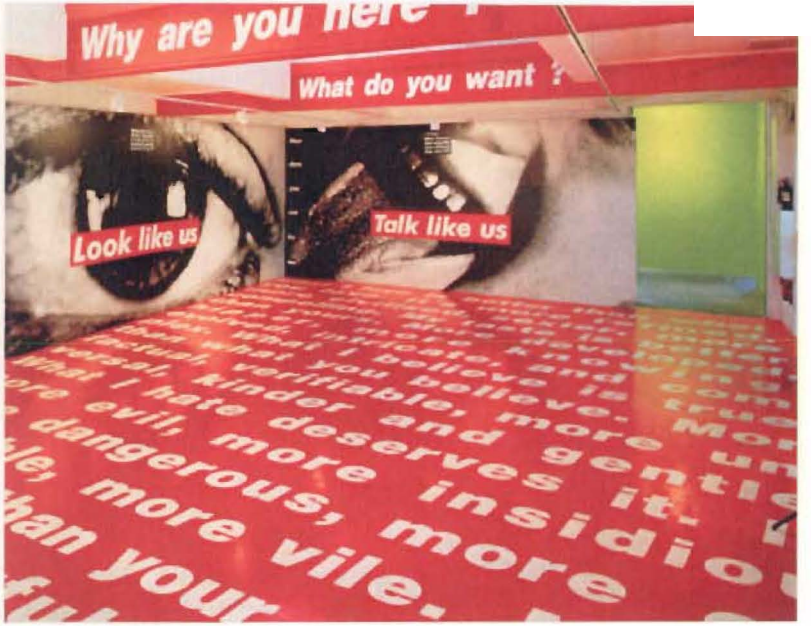


fig. 26

fig. 27

fig. 28

fig. 29

fig. 31

fig. 32

fig. 33

34

fig. 35

36

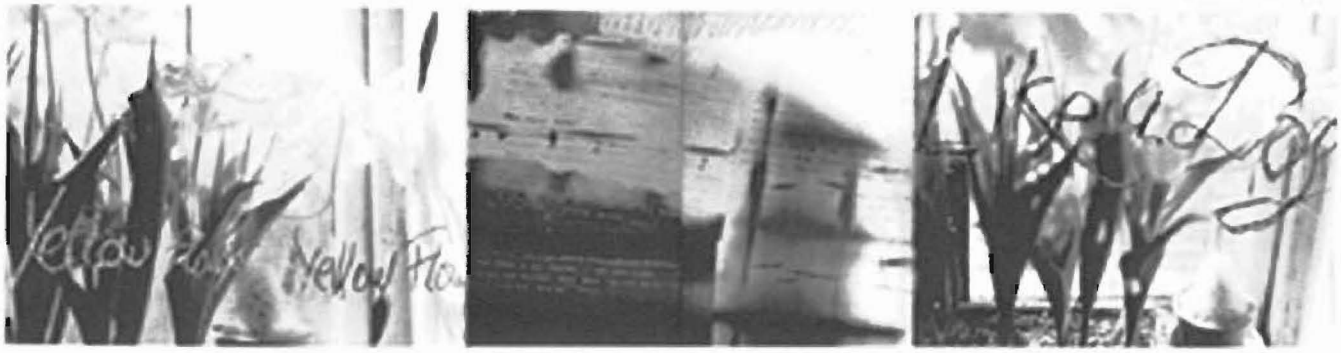
fig. 37

fig. 38


for my daughter Andrea
who died in an Airplane crash
at Tical in Guatemala on Dec 23.
last year She was 21 years
and she lived in this house
and I think of Andrea every
DAY
1975

Fig. 40


Rimo




KOREA WHO DIED
1954
1974


POUR LA FILLE

fig. 46


sick of
goodbys


ABOUT
FATE
DURING THE NIGHT OF MAY 19th 1987
AT THE BROOKLYN ZOO.
THE CASE OF THE POLAR BEARS
THE BEARS KILLED AND ATE THE
POLICE SHOT THE TWO POLAR BEARS

fig. 48

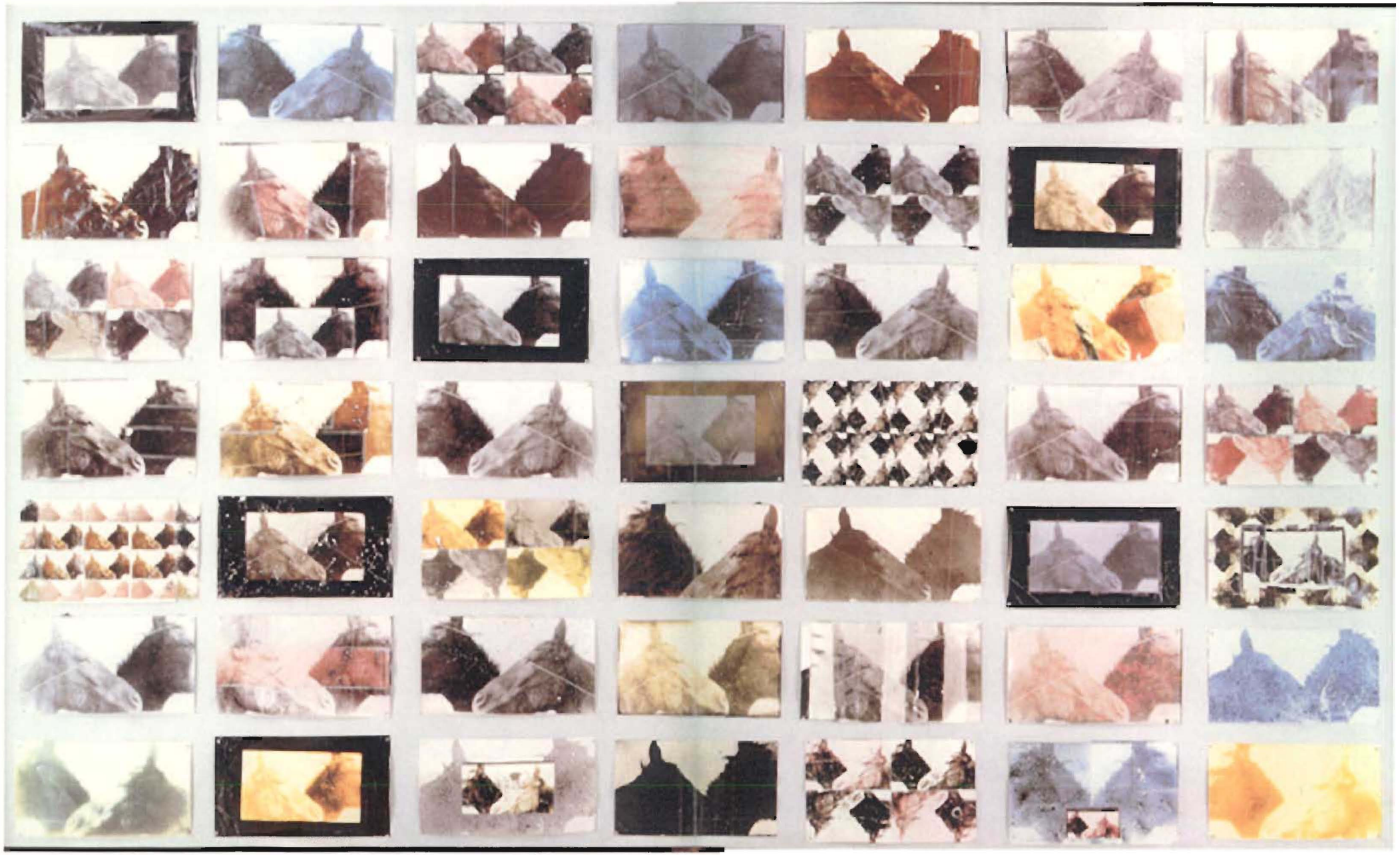


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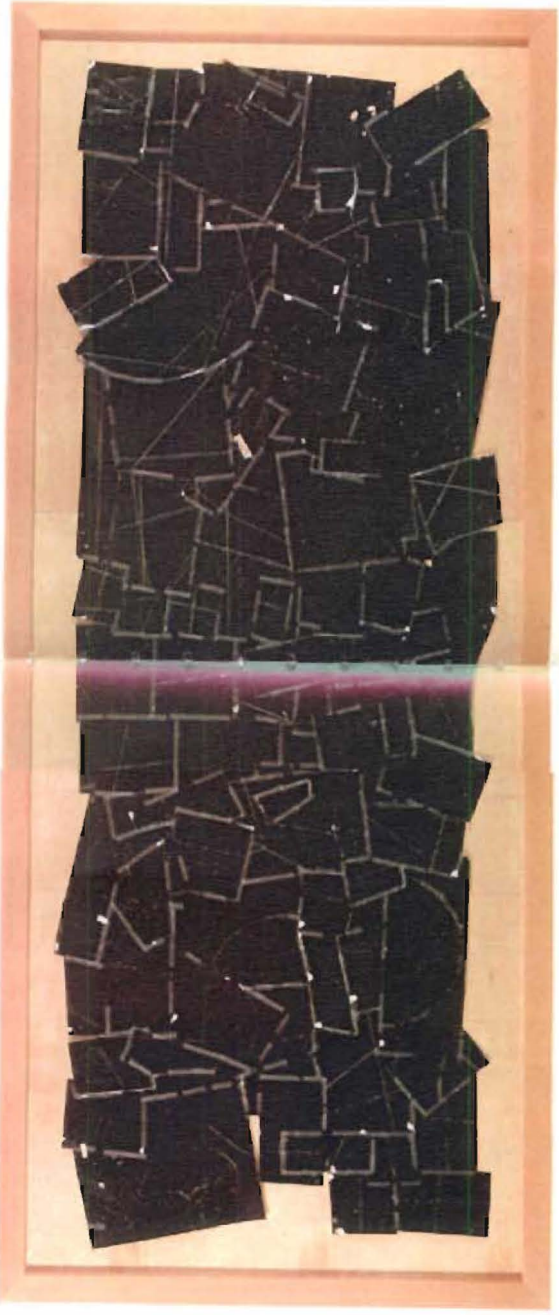
fig. 50



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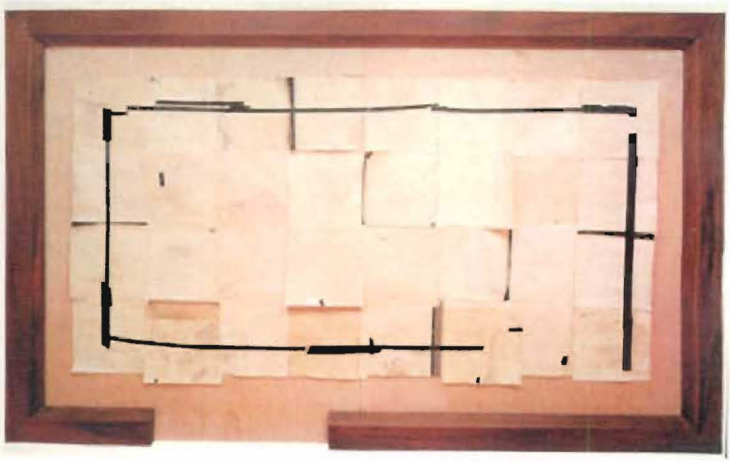
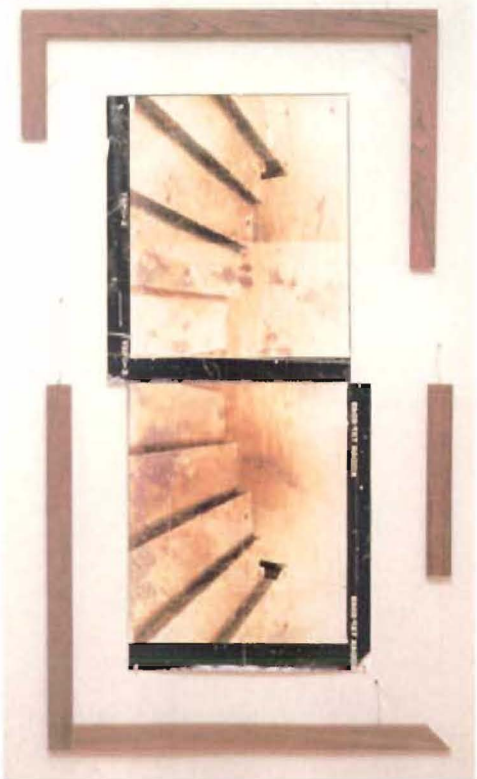


fig. 54

fig. 55

fig. 56



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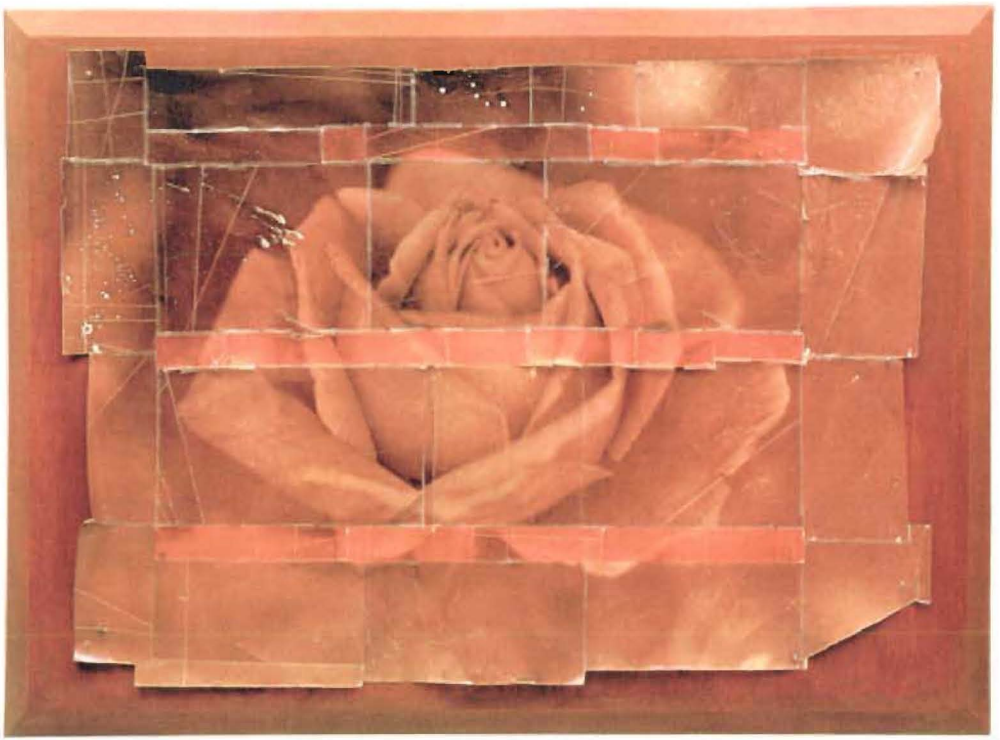
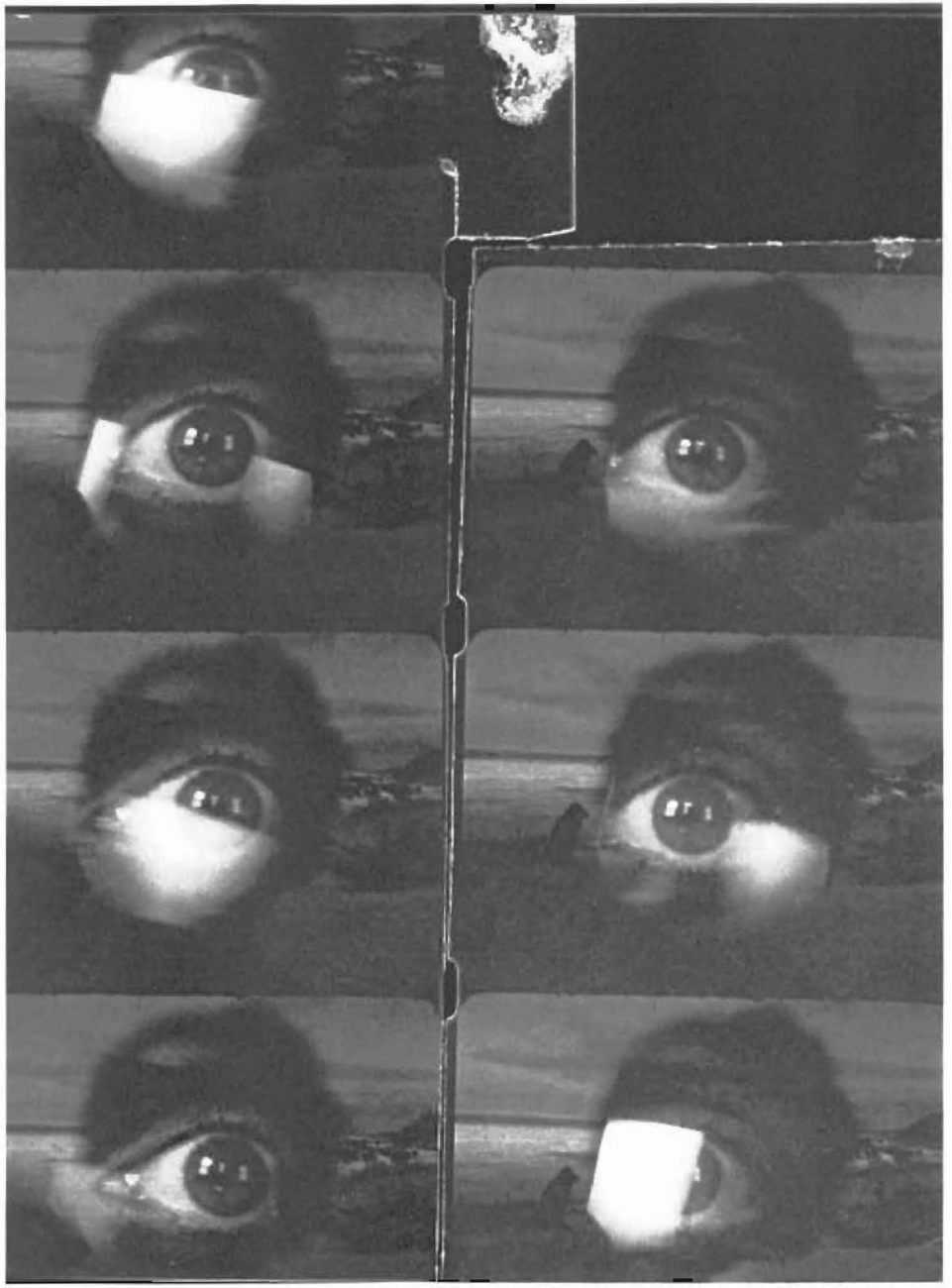
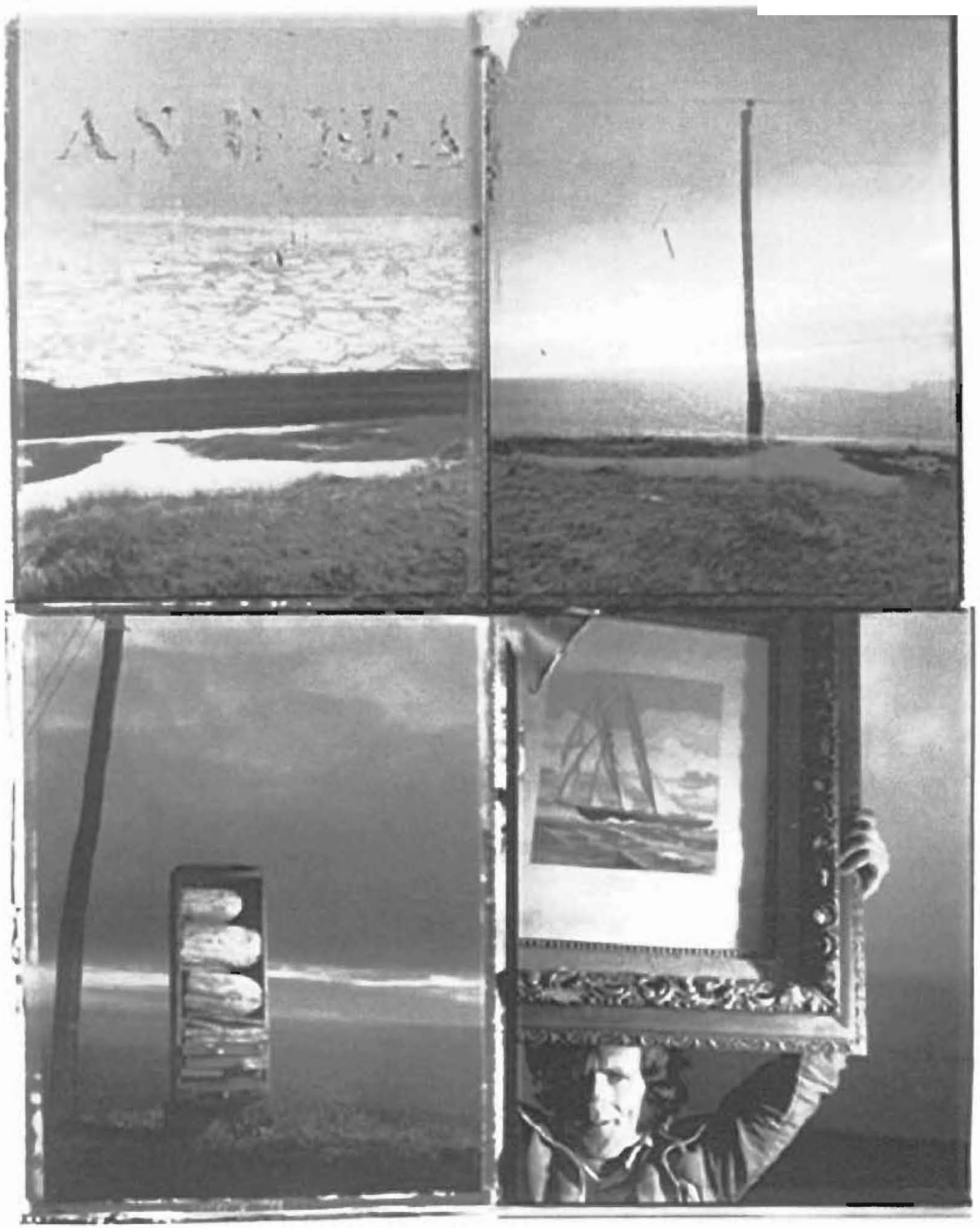






58

SHOPPING WITH MOTHER

When I was a little boy, my mother often took me shopping with her, and our last stop was always Cox's dress shop. She would sit me down in a chair surrounded by our purchases and say, "Sit there. I'll be right back". And off she would vanish into the dress racks. For the first five minutes it was a relief just to be seated, but a terrible anxiety began to grow within me that she would never return. I had been abandoned! In 1932 God dropped me off on this planet and said, "Sit there, I'll be right back." Well I have sitting here now for forty six years, and the bastard hasn't returned. For all I know he's off in Andromeda trying on dresses and has forgotten all about me. And I know that he is never coming back.

g. 59

I AM MUCH NICER THAN GOD

It was last thursday, when I awoke finally, that I realized that I was much nicer than God. I knew that I would never had let him suffer all those months. And I knew I would have invented cancer in the first place. I would never let children fall asleep hungry or let people die alone.

But if it is true that I am nicer than God, with my vanity and petty pleasures then I am in despair.

ig. 60

A FAILED ATTEMPT TO PHOTOGRAPH REALITY

How foolish of me to believe that it would be that easy. I had confused the appearances of trees and automobiles, and people with reality itself, and believed that a photograph of these appearances to be a photograph of it. It is a melancholy truth that I will never be able to photograph it and can only fail. I am a reflection photographing other reflections within a reflection. To photograph reality is to photograph nothing.

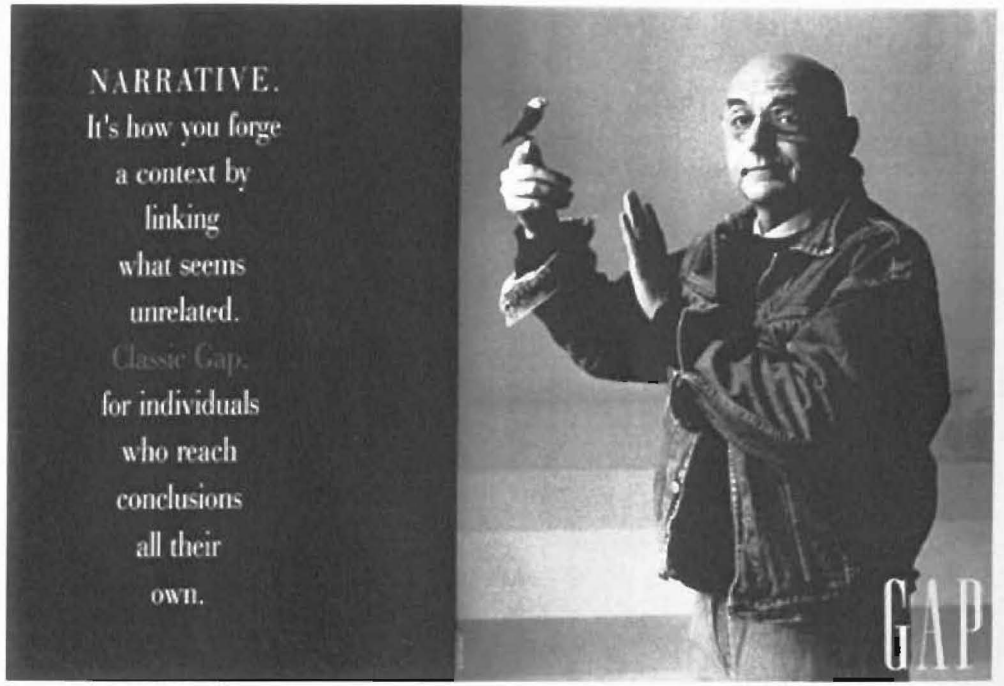


Fig 62

Time is such a funny thing.
It's like the Rolling Stones.
It's always now and never then.
But when I say it's now again
It's never now but always then.
Here always here but never there.
But when I go from here to there
Then there is here and here is there
Should you think you're very tall
Next to a tree you're not at all,
And if you think you're very small
Not to a flea you're feel tall.
When we dream we seem awake,
But all along the dream was fake.
To me "I" and never you.
You say you're "I" and also me.
I know that's true, How can that be
Since I'm not you and you're not me
Time as not what you might think
It is and isn't in the brink.

Fig 63

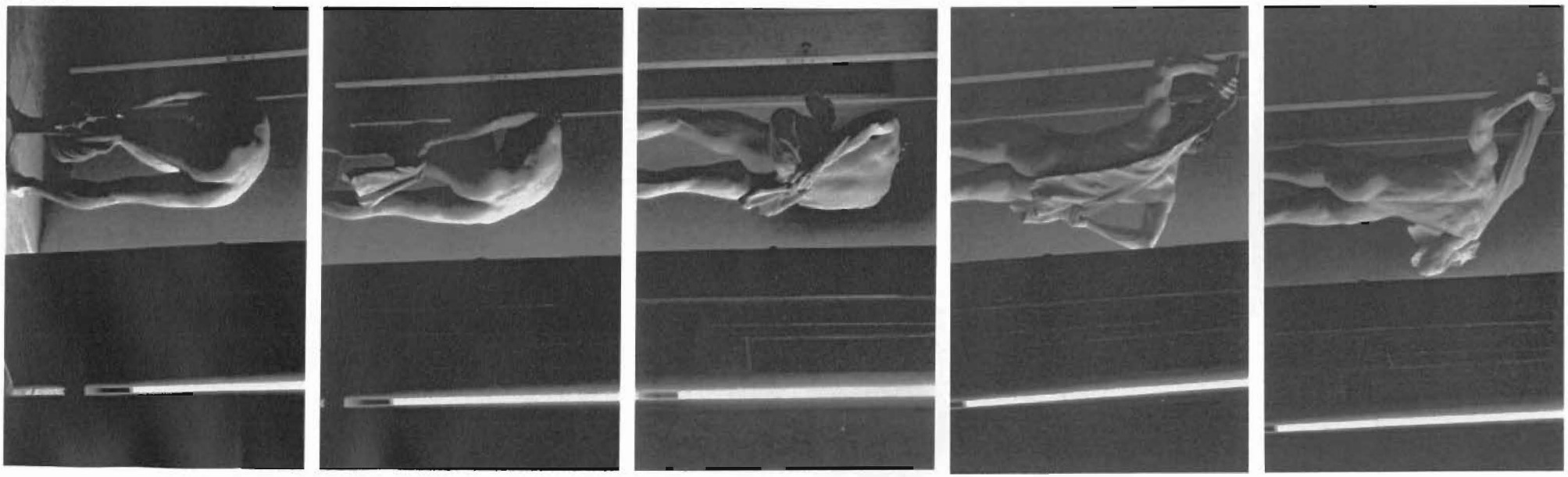


fig 64

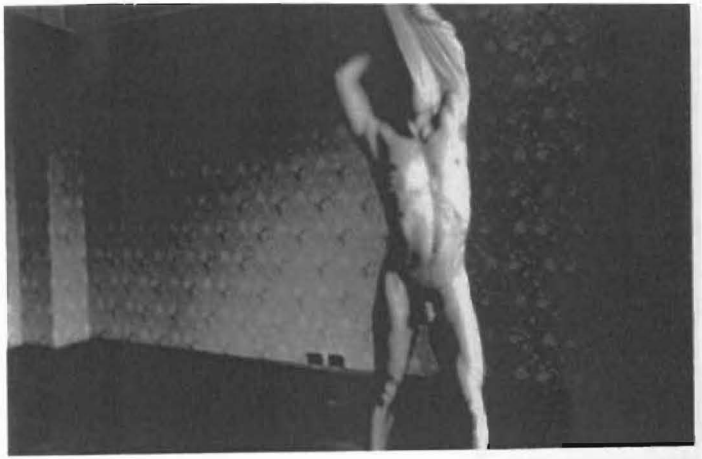
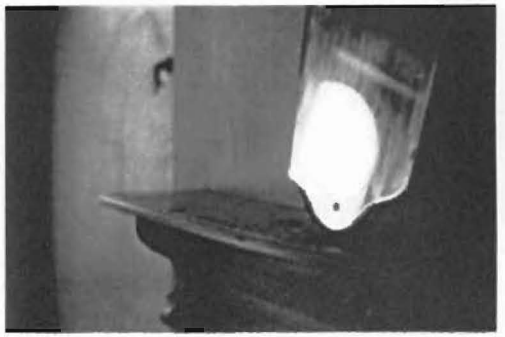


fig 65

WHO AM I ?

fig 66



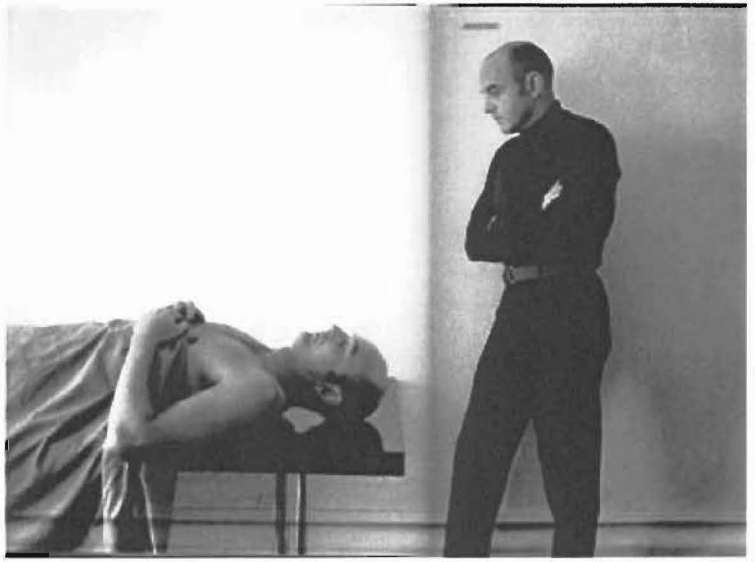


Fig. 68

Fig. 69

A STORY ABOUT A STORY

This is a story about a woman who is telling a story about a man telling a story
He sits in front of a mirror and tells his tale to the man he sees — the mirror
then the man in the mirror thanks he is telling a tale to the man he sees in the mirror
He finishes a box and then he opens it to finds another box inside
And that box has one even smaller box inside of it with yet another smaller box inside
When he comes to the tiniest box of all he takes a magnifying glass to look
But all he sees is an eye looking back at him
He then confesses whereto he will tell others about a man
who is dreaming about a man who is dreaming
and so you are reading this & writing a story about you reading a story
about me looking at a story
Did you like this story? No one has read it till it to you

Fig. 70

Fig. 71

fig. 72

fig. 73